

THE ARGOSY.

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ASHLEY.

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CHAPTER I.

LAURETTA CARNAGIE.

THE red light of the sun, nearing its setting, shone brilliantly on the fair domains of Ashley. The house, a fine mansion, stood on an eminence in its own park and commanded an extensive view of the near and distant scenery. Several of the windows opened to the lawn, and there leisurely stepped out of one of them a gentleman of middle age, followed by a young lady in the bloom of youth. He, Sir Henry Ashley, held a telescope in his hand, and, setting it to the right focus, turned it in the direction of the high road, which they could see winding along beneath them into the distance.

"Anna!" called out a peremptory voice from inside the room, "you have not put on your sun-bonnet."

"I have my parasol, mamma."

"Come in and put on your sun-bonnet instantly. Your face will be a fright to be seen. The sun this month browns worse than at midsummer."

Lady Pope's mandates were not to be disobeyed, and Anna Rivers retreated to the house.

"Look here, Anna," said Sir Henry Ashley, when she reappeared, "yours is a farther sight than mine. Is that the carriage, near Prout's farm? There's something moving."

Miss Rivers looked towards the spot indicated by the baronet: first by aid of the glass, then steadily with her naked eye. "I think it is a post-chaise, Sir Harry," was her answer.

"Then there has been some bungle at the station, and she has missed my carriage."

"There always is a bungle when things are left to servants," interposed Lady Pope's voice again. "You should have gone yourself, as I advised, Sir Harry."

"So I would, had I been sure of her coming. But I went

yesterday, and I went the day before, and nothing came of it. I can't pass my days dancing between here and Stopton. She's staying, no doubt, at that old Indian's at Liverpool. They who were to receive her and start her off here."

"I wish she was not coming at all," cried Lady Pope. "The idea of a gay man—as you may be called—being left resident guardian to a girl of twenty! Steps must be taken to provide her with another home—and a never-ending trouble I foresee we shall have about it. You might have taken my advice and declined to receive her here at all. Under the circumstances you would have been justified, without any breach of politeness."

"It would have been more a breach of kindness," said Sir Harry drily. "As you happen to be with me, this house is as suitable for her, at present, as any other. But I cannot make out how it was the General never received the news of my wife's death."

"Very likely you forgot to write," observed Lady Pope. "Carelessness was always the besetting sin of Henry Ashley."

A conscious smile curled Sir Henry's lip. Carelessness his besetting sin! then what might be said of many others that beset him? He made his sister no reply. She was given by nature to fits of grumbling, and Sir Harry had long ago found that the best plan was to let her grumble the fit out. He took up a newspaper, stretched himself on one of the benches, and read away at ease. Lady Pope raised her voice now and then, but Sir Harry took refuge in the journal, as an excuse for silence. Presently Anna Rivers, who had walked to the brow of the slope, came back again.

"The chaise is coming on quickly, Sir Harry. It *is* a chaise. It has taken the Ashley turning."

"Then she *has* missed the carriage!" protested Lady Pope. "Those two men will be sticking themselves with it, at Stopton, till the last train's in to-night: and that will be eleven o'clock. Getting tipsy, of course. Bad management, Sir Harry."

An interval of expectation, and the chaise spoken of rattled on the gravel drive of the lawn. A tall, distinguished-looking young man sprang from it before it had well stopped. Lady Pope wheeled her chair to the glass door, and put her head out, hoping to bring the arrival within view; her ears also at work, as they generally were.

"That's not Miss Carnage! Why, I do believe it is —— Anna," she sharply called out, breaking off her sentence, "Anna, come here. That's never Arthur Ashley?"

"Yes, mamma."

"What brings him here now? He ——"

"How are you, dear Lady Pope?" cried the stranger, coming up with Sir Harry, and holding out his hand.

"None the better for seeing you, Mr. Ashley," was the civil rejoinder. "Pray how is it that you come wasting your time here now, shirking your studies?"

"I went up for honours, dear aunt, and gained them. So I can afford myself a holiday." At which satisfactory information, Lady Pope vouchsafed nothing but an unsatisfactory grunt.

The two gentlemen were speedily immersed in college politics, reminiscences to Sir Henry, realities to Arthur Ashley. Sir Henry had never gained university honours, had never tried for them, but he was delighted that Arthur, his presumptive heir, should do so. Sir Henry had been always childless, and this young man, his brother's eldest son, was the present heir to Ashley. Sir Henry had taken to him years ago, and brought him up as such.

A short period, and another arrival aroused them. They went out to meet it, Sir Harry hurriedly, Arthur Ashley and Miss Rivers lingeringly, for he seized the opportunity of speaking to her in a whisper. Sir Henry's carriage was drawn up before the entrance. A lady, dark as a gipsy, with flashing eyes and features of great beauty, sat in it, whilst a copper-coloured woman was awkwardly descending from the seat behind. Sir Harry soon had Miss Carnagie on his arm, and led her in.

She seemed to take in everything with those keen, flashing eyes ; the extensive grounds, the indoor arrangements of the house ; and now she was addressing Lady Pope. It struck some of them that she was more self-possessed in manner than is common to a girl of twenty.

"I hope I have the pleasure of meeting Lady Ashley in good health."

"This is my sister, Lady Pope," interrupted Sir Harry. "I wrote to General Carnagie of the loss I had experienced in my wife : the letter must have miscarried. Lady Pope and Miss Rivers will welcome you, dear Miss Carnagie, as warmly as Lady Ashley would have done."

"I am an invalid," broke in Lady Pope : "a chronic affection of the hip joint : and cannot walk without difficulty. So I am chiefly confined, in the day, to this chair. Anna Rivers will be my substitute in showing you to your rooms."

At the foot of the stairs, when Anna Rivers was conducting Miss Carnagie towards them, they came upon young Ashley. "As no one has thought me worthy of an introduction to Miss Carnagie, I suppose I must introduce myself," he said. "Miss Carnagie, I am Arthur Ashley."

His voice was so pleasant, his manner so easy, himself altogether so much of a gentleman, that it would have been sufficient passport to her favour, even without his good looks, and Miss Carnagie thought so. But she hurried on. If ever there was a vain girl on earth, it was Lauretta Carnagie, and she had no mind to linger with strangers until the dust and the travelling attire were taken off her. She had a favourite theory—that first impressions were everything. Some trunks were in her room, and the copper maid was seated on them ; her

head wrapped round with folds of pink merino, and her shoulders with a covering of white linen.

"You good-for-nothing, vicious creature!" broke out Miss Carnagie. "How dare you sit idling there, instead of putting out my things to dress?"

"How can Nana get out missie's things if missie got the keys?" responded the woman, her broad mouth breaking into a respectful, pleasant smile.

"She is the most idle thing alive," said Miss Carnagie to Anna, as she threw a ring of keys to the attendant. "Indian servants always are. If I were not to rate her continually, I should get nothing done. Papa was often obliged to have her flogged."

"Flogged!" uttered Anna, who had stood by, quite distressed at witnessing such courtesy to a servant.

"And as you don't allow flogging in England, and she knows it, she has made up her mind to be as vicious and troublesome as possible," proceeded Miss Carnagie. "My mother was the daughter of a West Indian planter, and Nana was a slave born on the estate, so she is our own property, just the same as our horses or dogs. They had her taught hair-dressing and millinery, that she might be a maid to me; and when mamma died, she specially bequeathed her to me."

"But Nana not idle, Nana not vicious; Nana love missie, and try, try, alwars to please her with all her heart," interrupted the woman, whilst tears ran down her cheeks.

"Can I assist you in any way?" inquired Anna Rivers of Miss Carnagie. "If not, I will no longer intrude upon you."

"You don't intrude. I hate to be alone. Sit down while she does my hair. I want to know all about everything here. You are aware I am a stranger. Do you live here?"

"No. I am visiting here with mamma, Lady Pope."

"Was that really Sir Harry Ashley? I pictured him as old as my father: and he had white whiskers and a bald head. Your uncle is a young man. At least, we should call him so in India: men age so rapidly there."

"Sir Harry is more than forty: near fifty, I believe. But he is not my uncle."

"No! He introduced Lady Pope as his sister."

"But Lady Pope is not my mother. In point of fact, she is not related to me. My father, Captain Rivers, was a widower, and she—who was Miss Ashley then—married him. I was only two years old, and have never known any other mother. My father did not live long, and then she married an elderly man, Colonel Sir Ralph Pope."

"Is he here?"

"Oh! he is dead too: has been dead a long while."

"Who was that we met in the hall? 'Arthur Ashley,' he said. Some one also attached to the house?"

"Sir Harry's nephew. He lives here. He is the heir to Ashley. His father, Sir Harry's brother, was the heir, but he is recently dead."

"He will be Sir Arthur Ashley?"

"Of course. In time."

"Which dress missie wear?" inquired Nana, displaying two or three, all of them much alike: black silk with crape trimmings.

Miss Carnagie pointed to one. "It is so annoying to be in mourning!" she pettishly exclaimed. "One can never appear to advantage."

"I like black silk," remarked Anna. "It always looks well."

"For you, who are fair; but I look like a great black crow in it." And Anna Rivers laughed.

Not like a black crow, but like a handsome girl. Sir Harry thought so when she descended to the drawing-room, and so did Arthur Ashley. The latter was extremely fond of handsome girls, and ready to flirt with all he had the good fortune to meet.

It was no doubt very wrong of Lady Pope, but she was given to building castles in the air. She might have raised as many for herself as she pleased, but an inconvenience sometimes arose when she so favoured her friends. Several years older than her brother, she had exercised an influence over himself and his actions in early life, which she strove still to retain. She it was who had helped him to his wife, and now she had it in her head to help him to another—and that other Anna Rivers. Anna was so completely under her finger and thumb, that she felt sure if she could only see her my Lady Ashley, *she* should be the real ruler of her brother's house. A suspicion had certainly arisen in her mind that Anna cared rather too much for Arthur Ashley, but it gave her little concern. She held the young lady in perfect subjection, and she entered on a course of snubbing towards the gentleman, which she hoped would not fail to drive him away from Ashley. Cold, cautious and positive, Lady Pope rarely failed to carry out any scheme on which she had set her mind.

The time went on, and Lauretta Carnagie grew in favour with some of the inmates of Ashley. Not with all. Lady Pope took a dislike to her, and the same may be said of Anna Rivers. Miss Carnagie combated Lady Pope's wishes, she was indifferent to her complaints and ailments, she shocked her prejudices. It was next to open warfare between them; their tastes and pursuits were so completely antagonistic. Breakfast over, Lady Pope would call for her work-basket and begin her morning's employment. Sometimes it would be clothes for charity children, sometimes ornamental fancy-work. Miss Carnagie held both in equal contempt.

"If you would undertake some amusement of this nature, you would soon find pleasure in it," began Lady Pope to her one day.

"Suppose you were to work a pair of slippers, for instance, for your friend at Liverpool, Nabob Call."

"Pleasure in anything so horrid! Thank you. I never learnt needlework, and hope I never shall. It is only fit for old maids and ugly women."

"As I cannot be included with either of those classes, I will not reply to your words," was Lady Pope's retort, smothering her ire.

"I did not say others never did any. I said it was only fit for that sort of people," was the careless apology of Miss Carnagie.

"If you were to amuse yourself with a little music this morning?"

"I never play when there's no one to play for."

"We have plenty of books. Anna, reach——"

"Don't trouble yourself. I don't care for reading."

"What do you care for, I wonder?" thought Lady Pope. "I fear, Miss Carnagie, this wet morning is rendering you very dull."

"Dreadfully so. I wish I had lain in bed."

"Lying late in bed is pernicious to the health. Even I, with my lame leg, am out of bed every morning at seven. How did you contrive to amuse yourself in India?"

"Oh, I like an Indian life!" was the animated reply: "no one there reproaches you with being idle. I rode, and dressed, and flirted, and lay to be fanned, and——"

"*Flirted!*" interrupted Lady Pope. "Surely I did not hear aright?"

"What's the harm of flirting?"

"A young lady reared in European society would shrink from such an avowal."

"Why, it is what everybody does," returned Miss Carnagie. "Those who say they don't, when they do, are hypocrites, that's all. Old ones are more addicted to it than young. I saw you flirting the other evening, when that man dined here, Lord—— what's his name? the new member."

Lady Pope turned green: she had never been so insulted in her life. "Miss Carnagie!" she uttered, in an awful tone. "Your remark upon myself I pass over with the contempt it deserves," she added, after a pause, during which no apology came from Miss Carnagie, "but I cannot allow such pernicious sentiments to be avowed in the hearing of Miss Rivers."

"They will do her no harm. Not half so much as poking her chest over that humdrum chenille stitch. I should throw it in the fire, if anyone forced me to do it. So would she, if she dared."

Anna Rivers looked up, a hot flush upon her face. She did *not* like the work, but she liked still less to fall under Lady Pope's displeasure.

"I declare it is clearing up!" called out Miss Carnagie, springing to the window before Lady Pope could find fitting words to retort. "Anna, get your habit on."

"I cannot permit Miss Rivers to go out now," said Lady Pope.

Miss Carnagie turned her back to Lady Pope. "Anna, I say, will you go with me or not? You heard Mr. Ashley say he would ride with us if the rain cleared up."

Anna shook her head, and whispered, "I dare do nothing that mamma opposes."

"You ought to have been born a slave, like old Nana," scornfully exclaimed Miss Carnagie; "the blacks on grandpapa's estate are under no worse thralldom than you." And Lady Pope was tempted to wish that she had been born a slave-driver, if she might have applied the whip to the young lady's shoulders.

Was such a girl likely to find favour with the precise Lady Pope? She sat on, in deep indignation, scolding Anna, who was not in fault, and believing that Miss Carnagie had retired to her own room, to indulge her idle habit of lying down, or to browbeat Nana. All at once, the clatter of horses' feet was heard on the gravel. Lady Pope raised her ear, touched her chair, and went whirling away to the window. Riding off, followed by a groom, was Miss Carnagie, in the company of Arthur Ashley.

Every nerve of propriety possessed by Lady Pope was tingling. Her chair reeled off to the fireplace, and the bell was rung violently. It was to summon the baronet: but Sir Harry was gone to the Sessions at Stopton. For two mortal hours her ladyship sat, feeding her indignation, and then the runagates entered. Only to increase it. For Miss Carnagie coolly said that they had had a delightful ride, and she should go again whenever she pleased. If Lady Pope forbid Anna Rivers to make one of the party, that the three might play propriety, her ladyship had nobody to thank but herself if they went without her.

"How in the world can you have been brought up?" demanded the astonished Lady Pope.

"Brought up!" echoed Miss Carnagie, who was determined not to "give in," "I was with mamma in England for seven years; from four years old till eleven; and then she took me back to Madras with a governess."

But if Miss Carnagie was in disgrace with Lady Pope, she found favour with her guardian. In her wilful ways, Sir Harry saw but charming grace; with her ready speech and her great beauty, he was more than fascinated. Miss Carnagie certainly possessed the art of attracting men to her side: no doubt her manners, to them, were more courteous than those she exhibited to Lady Pope. She privately told Sir Harry that Lady Pope was an ugly old tyrant, and Sir Harry enjoyed the confidence. His attention to her was growing more pointed than is usual from guardian to ward, and visitors to Ashley whispered, among themselves, that the place would soon have a second mistress. If Lady Pope had only suspected that!

But it appeared that visitors were reckoning without their host.

For Sir Harry's manner suddenly changed. He grew cool in his intercourse with Miss Carnagie, and, indeed, took to hold himself very much aloof altogether from home society, spending his time abroad, or in his own rooms. So much the more pleasing to Miss Carnagie. For Sir Harry Ashley she cared not; but a passion, strong and ardent as her own nature, had taken root within her for his nephew and heir. From the first moment she saw Arthur Ashley, he had made a deep impression on her. More fascinating, both in looks and manner, than any man she had hitherto known, it scarcely needed the opportunities, which were undoubtedly afforded in abundance, for this impression to grow into love. She already indulged visions of the future, when he should be her husband, hers only and for all time; when he should parade her to the world, his chosen and envied wife: she indulged in visions of her future sway as mistress of Ashley; for Lauretta Carnagie hankered after position, and possessed a love of money and social power. Her life in Madras had been one of pomp and luxury: but this same pomp and luxury had made considerable inroads on the fortune of General and Mrs. Carnagie, and when they died, the former but three months subsequent to the latter, it was found that their impoverished estate would afford but a few hundreds per annum for their daughter. Double its whole amount had hitherto been expended on her dress alone. So she sought Arthur Ashley's society, or he hers, or perhaps the seeking was mutual; at any rate, they were much together. Which was scarcely justifiable on Mr. Ashley's part, for an attachment, a real attachment, known to none, subsisted between himself and Anna Rivers. Almost from the first, Anna had detected the pleasure Miss Carnagie took in Mr. Ashley's society, and the bitter pains of jealousy were aroused in her heart. Had this wild Indian girl come to supplant her? It seemed like it. And Anna had no means of showing her resentment, save by absenting herself from Mr. Ashley's presence.

But it happened one warm summer evening that Anna met him in the shrubbery. He stopped and drew her arm within his, and greeted her familiarly and tenderly, as was formerly his wont.

"Let me alone, Mr. Ashley," she angrily replied. "Your right to treat me so has passed."

"Not passed yet, Anna," he rejoined, retaining her arm; "not till an explanation has taken place between us. Tell me the reason of your recent coldness. Why is it you have lately shunned me?"

Anna Rivers was superior to coquetry; moreover, she loved Arthur Ashley too well to indulge in it; and she looked at him in surprise.

"My conduct has only been regulated by yours," she said. "Ask yourself what that has been."

"Anna, let us clear up this bugbear between us. I suspect where the offence lies—in my being so much with Miss Carnagie. If this has given you uneasiness, I sincerely beg your pardon. We have

been together a great deal : I acknowledge it: but the fault has not been wholly mine."

"Mine, perhaps?" resentfully spoke Anna.

"Yes," he laughed, "for leaving me so much to myself; and also—if I may whisper it to you—Miss Carnagie's. She might have sought me less. Oh, Anna, you are a regular goose! These flighty damsels are worth their weight in gold to flirt with, but for anything else—excuse me. Why, I would not marry Lauretta Carnagie if the East India Company dowered her with all their possessions."

Now if the intelligent reader can imagine him—or her—self in Miss Carnagie's shoes, they may perhaps picture what might be that young lady's sensations when she heard this candid avowal of Ashley's heir: and hear it she did, for she was on the other side of the shrubbery hedge. All her wild blood, inherited from her half-caste West Indian mother, rose to boiling-water heat; nay, more like to bubbles of liquid fire. Never had she suspected that there was aught but common friendship between him and Miss Rivers.

Forgetful of all maidenly reserve, casting aside all delicacy of feeling, her veins tingling, her face glowing, and her splendid eyes flashing as with a tiger's fury, Lauretta Carnagie passed through an opening of the shrubbery, and stood before her rival and Mr. Ashley. Upon which Miss Rivers drew away from the latter, and stood proud and defiant, and the gentleman would have given all his pockets were worth, if some kind gust of wind, stronger than ordinary, had just then soared him aloft, and deposited him in any other spot of this wide earth. Serve you right, Mr. Arthur, for you have been unpardonably sweet upon that impulsive girl. Your conscience is telling you so: and it is of no use to mutter over the advice of the old song *now*, and register a vow to yourself that you will practically remember it, for evermore henceforth, if your good stars will only get you out of this one scrape—"It is well to be off with the old love, before we are on with the new."

"You have been professing to love me; you have been professing to love *her*," was the address of Miss Carnagie, while her frame trembled with passion, and the glow on her cheeks was fading to the hue of the grave. "Which of those pretensions was false, which genuine?"

For perhaps the first time in his life, before a woman, Arthur Ashley quailed, and his tongue forgot its honeyed readiness. Enough to make him. She stood, hot and fiery as her own clime, on one side, bending towards him to devour his answer; whilst on the other, she whom he really loved and had chosen for his bride, was drawn up like a repellent piece of marble.

His senses partially came to him. He took Anna's hand. "Allow me to conduct you to the house," he said "while I explain to Miss Carnagie. One moment," he deprecatingly added to the latter; "I will not keep you waiting longer."

Anna had no resource but to go, though she would have preferred to hear my gentleman "explain." "A sharp breeze," he whispered to her: "It will be the sooner over. On my soul it is her fault, more than mine: her foolish vanity has brought it on herself. Still, Anna, I humbly beg you to forgive me."

She did not answer. She only snatched away her hand, and sailed on by his side, in sullen silence. He saw her indoors, went back again, and Lauretta Carnagie met him.

"One word, Mr. Ashley," she vehemently uttered. "Do you love that girl, Anna Rivers?"

"Miss Rivers and I are old friends," he evasively answered.

"Tamper with me if you dare," she retorted. "I ask if Anna Rivers is anything to you?"

"What the deuce—let it come out—she can't shoot me," disjointly muttered Mr. Arthur. "It is probable that Anna Rivers may sometime be my wife," he said aloud, but in a low tone. "Not yet; perhaps not for years to come. But, Lauretta—"

"If you had behaved to me *so* in my father's house, in our own country; talked to me as you have done, you, nearly a married man, I would have had you scourged by the slaves. Scourged, sir, till you should have borne the marks for life."

Every manly feeling within him was stung to the quick, and he coloured to the roots of his fair hair. "Do not let us quarrel, Lauretta," he said. "Nothing has happened that need interrupt our friendship. If you, or I, ever caught ourselves dreaming that a warmer tie might hereafter unite us, why I suppose we must forget it."

"There is one thing I will never forget," she hissed in his ear—"what you have said this evening. It was well done of you, Arthur Ashley, to speak insultingly of me to *her*. I will wear those words in my heart until I am avenged."

She stalked away towards the house in her wild anger, and Mr. Ashley, breathing a blessing upon women in general and himself in particular, strode in another direction. "I'll go away for a day or two," thought he, "and give the thing time to blow over."

Revenge Miss Carnagie had spoken of, and revenge she meant to have; how, she did not see or know as yet. Perhaps it was nearer than she could have hoped. By way of a beginning, she went straight to Lady Pope in the drawing-room.

"Are you aware that there is a love affair afloat between Mr. Ashley and your daughter?" she said abruptly.

Lady Pope would have screamed, but for compromising her dignity. For Mrs. Wainwright, a visitor at Ashley, stood at her chair-elbow and heard the bold assertion. She waved Miss Carnagie away.

"Did you know that there was a clandestine affair going on between them?" persisted Miss Carnagie, who was not one to be waved away by Lady Pope.

"Where can you have learnt all these shocking words?" demanded Lady Pope at length. "'Clandestine affair!' Really, Miss Carnagie——"

"Did you know it, I ask?" she pertinaciously interrupted.

"Madam," was the stiff response of Lady Pope, "the word clandestine can never be coupled with my daughter's name. She would enter into no such engagement: I will answer for it. And I know not by what law of politeness you, a young stranger, come into my brother's house and thus presume to comment upon family matters." Saying which, her ladyship, calling hastily for the help of her maid, ascended to her dressing-room.

"You have committed high treason," laughed Mrs. Wainwright. "It is suspected that Lady Pope's heart is set upon her daughter becoming Lady Ashley. Arthur won't do for her, now that his hopes of succeeding to Ashley are fading."

Miss Carnagie raised her head quickly. "I thought Arthur was the heir to Ashley."

"Pooh, my dear! I would not give two pins for his chance now. Sir Harry is safe to marry again."

"And if he did—who would succeed?" breathlessly asked Miss Carnagie.

"Why his own children, of course; his eldest son. Don't you understand these things? Arthur Ashley will be ready to cut the bride's throat, whoever she may be, for cutting out himself."

Miss Carnagie drew a long breath, and left Mrs. Wainwright without answer. She went to her own room, sent out Nana, with an imperious gesture, who happened to be there, sat down, and closed her eyes to think. She was capable of earnest self-communing, possessing the faculty of concentration in an unusual degree. Rapid and vehement in all her ways, her decision was taken ere she had sat there many minutes. "It will keep him out of Ashley," she muttered as she rose: "to do that, I would sacrifice myself to—to—a worse sacrifice than this will be. Wealth and position will at least be mine. And better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave!" Away she went down stairs towards the dining-room.

"Is Sir Harry in there still?" she inquired of a servant, whom she met near the door. "Mr. Ashley is not with him?"

"Mr. Ashley has just rode off to Brooklands, miss. He thinks of stopping a day or two, and I am now going to put up his carpet-bag and send it after him. Sir Harry is alone."

Lauretta Carnagie opened the dining-room door softly, and closed it after her. It was nearly dusk then, and Sir Harry had left the table, and was sitting in his easy-chair near the large window. He rose up in surprise at sight of Miss Carnagie, as she advanced close to him, and took up her position against the window-frame. She looked at him, but did not at first speak. Was she considering his personal

attractions? They were such that many a woman might have admired. It was true he was no longer to be called young, but not a shade of silver mixed with his glossy hair; not a wrinkle, as yet, defaced his broad forehead. Time had been considerate to Sir Henry Ashley. In that dim, uncertain light, he might have been taken for but a few years past thirty. Miss Carnagie spoke at last, dropping her eyes to the ground.

"I have been thinking how ungrateful I was, so positively to refuse —what you asked me. And I——"

"My dear child," he interrupted, "say no more. I ought not to have laid myself open to a certain refusal. The pain that inflicted brought me to my senses; and if I have since secluded myself, scarcely meeting you but at meals, it has not been from any resentful feeling towards you, but that I would get over the too warm interest I had felt for you."

Miss Carnagie did not answer: perhaps the purport of Sir Harry's speech was different from what she expected. He continued:

"My wife I married in early life. To say I loved her would be wrong; I never did. My sister wished the match between us; I mistook friendship for love, and fell into it. She was a good wife to me, and our life was calm: I can say no more for it. But when you came, Lauretta, when we had mixed together in habits of intimacy, when I had protected you as my ward, then, indeed, I found what it was to love. I gave way to it without consideration. I forgot that my years had passed their meridian, and that yours were yet in their dawn, and like a fool, I hazarded my fate—and met with a refusal. I am speaking now more calmly, you see, than I could at the time."

"But," she resumed in a low tone, "I came this evening to tell you that—I—think I was mistaken as well as hasty."

A silence ensued. When Sir Harry broke it, his voice was hoarse with emotion.

"I am not sure that I understand—that I dare understand. Lauretta, that one repulsion cost me dear: I will not hazard another. Give me fully to understand what you really mean."

"Would you be pleased if I say I retract my refusal, and ask you to pardon it?"

"*Pleased!* Lauretta!"

"That if you will take me with my faults and my wilfulness, I am ready to say you may have me?"

"You are not deceiving me?" he murmured.

"I *never* deceive," she answered, with so passionate a touch of scorn in her tone, that one in the secret might know she was thinking of how she had been deceived by Arthur Ashley.

He flung his arms round her, and gave utterance to the deep love she had excited in his heart: all the stronger for its recent suppression. That a passion so powerful should have arisen in Sir Henry Ashley, with his nearly fifty years! But so it was.

"I trust I am guilty of no dishonour in thus winning you for myself—of no breach of the confidence imposed in me by your father," he said, in a musing manner, half to himself, half to her. "My position is one to which even he could not object, and the contrast in our years is, it seems to me, a consideration for you alone."

"For no one else," she answered.

"Lauretta! how we may deceive ourselves!" he went on. "Shall I tell you a notion that has recently possessed me?—that you and Arthur were becoming attached to each other. You were so much together. Poor fellow! this will be a blow to his prospects. Had I foreseen Lady Ashley's premature death, I never would have adopted him, or encouraged the notion of his inheritance."

A curious expression passed over her face. But at this moment, after a sharp knocking, as with a stick, the door was flung open, and who should enter but Lady Pope, her crutch on one side of her, her maid on the other, the latter bearing a flaring candle. Setting that on the table, and her mistress on a chair, she retired from the room. Sir Harry came forward, his brow darkening: "To what accident was he to attribute Lady Pope's intrusion?"

Lady Pope did not tell him. We can. She was sitting with her dressing-room door open, partly for air, partly that she might see all the passing and re-passing in the passages, when a servant came by with a packed carpet-bag, which she recognised as Arthur's, and she demanded where that was going to. To Brooklands, the man answered. Mr. Arthur was gone over there.

Up went her ladyship's curiosity. What was he gone there for, so suddenly? Did Sir Harry know? Where was Sir Harry?

Sir Harry was still in the dining-room. Miss Carnagie was with him.

Miss Carnagie! echoed Lady Pope. The servant must be mistaken.

Oh no. He had seen her go in with his own eyes, and close the door.

This was a climax for Lady Pope. Why, what possessed this girl, that she was turning the whole house topsy-turvy? Go and shut herself in with Sir Harry before he had left the dining-room! She would tell her, this moment, what she thought of such conduct. "Send my maid here instantly!" she exclaimed to the servant.

So the maid and the crutch and Lady Pope, and a candle to guide her ladyship's steps, for the staircase lamps were not yet alight, sailed into the dining-room, and Sir Harry inquired to what cause he was to attribute the intrusion.

"I came to ascertain to what cause may be attributed *hers*," was Lady Pope's sarcastic rejoinder. "Really, Sir Harry—and I am glad to have the opportunity of saying this to you in her presence—unless Miss Carnagie can conform to the usages of decent society, I would recommend you to resign your guardianship, and suffer her to depart."

"In what way has Miss Carnagie transgressed them?" demanded Sir Harry.

"In what way does she not? A most unpardonable transgression is her coming here, at this hour, in this room, and remaining in it with you."

"I shall not eat her," said Sir Harry.

"Sir Harry Ashley," resumed Lady Pope, in a crushing voice, "if you deem my visit here an *intrusion* to be noticed in words, by what name can you designate hers? You may be forgetful of forms and propriety—men generally are—but it is my place to see that they are observed by, and towards, Miss Carnagie. Miss Carnagie, you will oblige me by quitting this room with me. Sir Harry, call in my maid. I told her to wait outside."

"Miss Carnagie remains here with me," returned Sir Harry. "We will join you when tea is ready. You seem to overlook the fact that, as guardian and ward, we may have business to transact together."

"Not at unseasonable hours," persisted the exasperated Lady Pope. "If Miss Carnagie remains here, I shall. It is really quite—quite improper, Sir Harry. I'll thank you to order the chandelier lighted, if we are to stay. That candle hurts my eyes."

Sir Harry was provoked—as he could be, very much so, on occasions. "Lady Pope," he said, "you are assuming rather too much. I, as Miss Carnagie's guardian, am a competent judge for her of what is proper. That I shall guard her from what is improper you may well believe, when I inform you that in her you see my future wife."

Had Poor Lady Pope received a dose of chloroform she could not have been more completely overcome. Her mouth opened, her chin fell, down dropped her arms, and down went her crutch with a rattle. Sir Harry had drawn Miss Carnagie's arm within his, and they both stood facing her.

"The future wife—*yours?*" were the first words she gasped.

"My own dear future wife, Lady Ashley."

"Are you bereft of your senses, Henry Ashley, or am I?" she inquired. "If I am not, I would ask if you have reflected on the miserable consequences that this will entail? The cruelty, the injustice to Arthur Ashley?"

"Enough," peremptorily interrupted Sir Henry, as he flung open the door and summoned the maid, who stood very close to it, to take away her mistress. "Order tea," he said to her ladyship: "we will soon be with you."

Lady Pope meekly obeyed, and prepared to leave with the servant. Her spirit was completely stricken down, and lay (as may be said) in dust and ashes. But first of all she beckoned Sir Harry to her, and, drawing him down, whispered in his ear:

"Henry, my brother, one word—for your own sake. Is this inevitable?"

He nodded.

"Oh, think better of it! If it be possible break it off. She is not a woman to make any husband happy. She will make *you* miserable."

"No more," he coldly said. But she held him still.

"Henry, do you hear me? *miserable*."

"I hear," was the indifferent, almost contemptuous reply. "I will chance it."

The neighbourhood was electrified when it heard that Sir Harry Ashley was to marry his ward; not only electrified, but shocked. Sir Harry, for the last twelve or fifteen months, had been looked upon as a high prize in the matrimonial lottery, and everyone was ready to devour Miss Carnagie alive. She came in for the usual share of abuse: some ventured to speak against her to Sir Harry. She was too young, and too wilful, and too poor, and too proud, and too—a great many other things; but Sir Harry was too much for them all, and held to his bargain.

The wedding took place in Liverpool in the month of October, Miss Carnagie being married from the house of her late father's friends there, Nabob and Mrs. Call. Anna Rivers was bridesmaid, and perhaps she was the only one, save the parties themselves, who rejoiced in the union. But she could not overget the miserable jealousy Miss Carnagie had caused to her heart, or the general discomfort she had brought to Ashley.

Arthur Ashley was joked, rallied and condoled with. It was certainly a grievous disappointment, but he behaved magnanimously, and would not show it. Sir Harry handed over to him the writings of Thorncliff, a small estate, worth a few hundreds a-year, and promised something about a government appointment. "Don't thank me for Thorncliff," he said; "I'll listen to nothing in the shape of thanks. I feel as if I had injured you, and this is a sop in the pan. But cheer up, my boy, who knows? you may be Sir Arthur yet."

Arthur answered good-humouredly that the chances were against it. He knew they were. And he knew also—his conscience was telling it to him at that very moment—that the fading away of his inheritance had been partly brought about by his own folly—that he had himself to thank for having lost Ashley.

(*To be continued.*)

A SHORT DIARY OF THE DAYS GONE BY.

The following extracts from an account of a journey to Calais in 1814 may interest the reader, as affording a glimpse of the manners and customs of the early part of this century; and as touching upon scenes and persons that have passed into History. The MS. has remained until now with the daughter of the writer of the Diary, to whom it passed upon the Author's death.

EMBARKED for Calais in a Deal boat at half-past one o'clock on Thursday, 14th April, 1814; fine weather till four, when it began to rain and blow, the wind changing every minute, and being at times quite tremendous. At five o'clock we were greatly alarmed by an English brig making signal for us not to proceed: five guns were fired at us, and it was half-an-hour before we were relieved from our anxiety. They merely requested us to take a letter from the brother of Talleyrand (whom we saw in the vessel) to Calais.

We proceeded; the weather continued unfavourable, the wind went round the compass in the course of ten minutes, and as soon as it abated we were becalmed. At length, at about half-past ten o'clock, we entered the harbour, which is a remarkably fine one with a wooden pier a quarter of a mile long. The water being low we soon ran aground, and being obliged to cast anchor, we were detained some time. As soon as we got clear again, the gentlemen went ashore in the little boat and with difficulty towed us along. About eleven o'clock we landed on the pier, and here a new difficulty arose from the gates of Calais being shut, which is always done at eight o'clock in the evening; and, had it not been for the letter which we received from the brig, I know not whether we should have gained admittance. In this respect we were fortunate, and were happy to find ourselves at half-past eleven at Dessein's Hotel, which is extremely large: but although they make up a hundred beds, we were so unlucky as to find them all engaged. However, we sat down to a comfortable supper with a good appetite, having had no dinner, and presently had the satisfaction of being shown into an apartment containing three small beds, which, although they could not boast much comfort, afforded us that rest we so much needed, for we were all dreadfully fatigued from the length of our passage.

Friday, April 15th, 1814.

About ten o'clock this morning we arose much refreshed, and after breakfast took a walk on the pier and in the town. The latter is larger than Deal, with a fine town hall, market place, and one church. The streets are tolerably wide, but very inconvenient to

foot-passengers, people being obliged to walk in the carriage road, as there is no broad stone. The houses have a dirty, shabby appearance ; they are built of yellow bricks, and look smoke-dried. The fortifications all round the town are very strong. You enter by five gates on the English side, which to me resembled the entrance to a prison more than anything else.

Our reception was most flattering, being the first English ladies who had landed on that coast for many years. The people followed us all the time we were walking, giving us their blessing, and crying, "Vive Louis XVIII.! " Every countenance was expressive of the greatest joy and satisfaction.

There is a small town enclosed within a high wall, on the outside of the gates of Calais, for the fishermen and their families. It is composed of seven narrow dirty streets, but the inhabitants appeared particularly happy, and testified their joy on seeing us even more than those of the upper town. I think I never saw such beautiful children, but dreadfully dirty, owing, I suppose, to their being so numerous.

We returned to dinner at about four o'clock, which was served up in a curious manner. One dish is brought in first, and when everyone has eaten of that, it is taken away, and replaced by another, and thus throughout the dinner ; they eat scarcely any vegetable, and very little pastry, sugar being five shillings a pound. They generally drink claret, and mix it with water for their dinner, instead of beer, which is not so good as in England. We drank tea with Mr. and Mrs. Collett, English people ; they have a very nice house, handsomely furnished, something in the style of our own country. Tea was handed in coffee cups, which is the custom in France. The side-board was covered with plate (a little silver cow served as cream jug), elegant waiters and silver urns, etc. Played at Boston in the evening, a French game with cards for four. Returned home to supper.

Saturday, April 16th, 1814.

We took a walk to the market, which is the finest I ever saw, it resembles a fair. The stalls are arranged in rows ; the corn is placed in sacks, and you may inspect it before you purchase, which certainly is a good regulation. Everything is remarkably cheap : fine turkeys five shillings each ; eggs twenty-six for sevenpence halfpenny, and all in proportion, but things are getting up very fast owing to the great demand to carry to England. The women and children all wear caps and handkerchiefs instead of bonnets, which I observe are always clean, but the rest of the dress is miserable. The town-crier came into the market with the lid of a kettle, which he struck instead of a bell, to our great amusement. After we had rambled about here some time, we walked to the fort nearest Fort Rouge, and examined the cannons and mortars, some of which are very fine. Returned home to dinner, after which, went on to the pier till tea. Mr. Mansel and his sister spent the evening with us. Played Boston.

Sunday, April 17th.

Mr. M. Morley returned to England. At half-past twelve o'clock all our party, with Miss Gaudoin and M. de la Loude, set off for Cologne, a pretty little village two miles from Calais, where M. de Flin resides, and with whom we spent the day. He has a large house and grounds ; the former is singularly built, the rooms are high pitched and octagon, no carpets, and chairs with rush bottoms. Comfort does not appear to be a consideration in France. We took a walk to a pretty little wood, in the centre of which is a monument and grave of a young lady, a friend of Mrs. Scholey's, who died of love at the age of twenty-one.

We spent the afternoon in singing. Returned to Calais at nine o'clock and sang till bed-time.

Monday, April 18th.

We arose at five o'clock, took breakfast, and set out with Miss Gaudoin and M. de la Loude, in addition to our own party, in a coach and three horses for Boulogne, four-and-twenty miles from Calais—an excellent road all the way, but hilly. Boulogne is larger than Calais. It is composed of the upper and lower town. There is a fine church, which we were permitted to go into. Three beautiful altar-pieces, with large silver candlesticks, ten in number—the cross, fish, etc., of silver. The body of the church is very large and contains a fine organ, on which I played, to the great delight of one of the priests who was with us. He was a very pleasant man, full of conversation, and extremely polite in explaining and showing us everything.

The army destined to invade England was encamped on a high hill on each side of the harbour, in which lay the flotilla. The mud walls of the tents still remain, and have a curious appearance. They are built regularly in rows like streets, but they are clearing them away for the sake of the land. Two hundred thousand men lived here for six years. The Emperor was often with the army ; but, from the frequent repulses he met with from the English, was always in bad humour. So sure was he in his own mind of success with this grand flotilla, that he had already begun to erect a monument in commemoration of the event. The scaffolding, which still remains, cost many thousands. The monument, I think, was but little advanced. From the camp you have a fine command of the town and harbour—which, as the Emperor was admiral of the fleet, was requisite. The ramparts enclosing the town are excessively pretty, and are about a mile round. From here you have a charming view of the environs, which are certainly fine. We dined at an English hotel, where we met with anything but civility—in this they are truly deficient. While amusing ourselves at the windows, we saw a Chevalier de St. Louis enter the courtyard. We were all amusing ourselves at this poor man's expense (for a more ridiculous figure and complete caricature I never beheld), when, to our great confusion and

surprise, Mrs. Scholey led him into the room, introduced him, and invited him to spend the day with us, although a perfect stranger to her as well as to us all—but he was a Chevalier de St. Louis, and that was sufficient for Mrs. S. I shall now describe his dress, which caused us so much mirth. He was a very tall thin old man, I should imagine he must have been nearly ninety; he had on a scarlet velvet coat and small-clothes of the same, an under waistcoat of fawn colour, and the outer one of green satin (these were laid open to display an uncommon broad shirt frill), white stockings and half boots, an immense cocked hat with a high feather, and a large stick in his hand, on which he sported several rings. He wore the croix de St. Louis round his neck, which he politely took off to show us. His manners were gentlemanly, and in spite of the singularity of his appearance his figure was truly venerable.

We returned to Calais at about ten o'clock, dreadfully tired, and after a good supper went to bed, highly gratified with the variety of the day.

Tuesday, April 19th.

It rained for an hour or two, but cleared off towards noon. Took a walk in the town. Mr. and Mrs. Morley had a large party to dinner, and we all went in the evening to Mr. Mansel, where we met a large party. Tea was handed in coffee cups, and many kinds of curious cake in great quantities, immediately after which wine was sent round, to my great astonishment; but I soon learnt that French ladies never drink tea, therefore this was made out of compliment to us. The lady of the house made up three card tables, and the rest of the company—about sixteen young persons—formed a circle and sang in turns. After the card players had finished we all danced, first a French cotillon, then an English country-dance, and, lastly, what they call a round, but what I should call a kissing dance, as there is more of that than anything else. We returned home about eleven o'clock. M. de la Loude supped with us.

Wednesday, April 20th.

A wet day. We dined at Mr. Collett's, and met Mr. and Mrs. de de Flin. A most elegant dinner. M. de la Loude and Miss Mansel came to tea. Played forfeits in the evening.

Thursday, April 21st.

Spent the evening at Madame Belchasse's, and heard her daughters play on the harp and sing beautifully. They lent us a great deal of music.

Friday, April 22nd.

Took a walk on the pier, and saw the prisoners of war from England disembark. Miss Betsy Gaudoin drank tea with us.

Saturday, April 23rd.

Walked out with Miss Gaudoin to make a few purchases, and

rambled about till dinner, after which we packed up things to remove. Mr. and Mrs. Morley being obliged to leave Dessein's Hotel, as Louis XVIII. was expected the next day, and the apartments they then occupied were destined for the Duke of Bourbon. Mr. and Mrs. de Flin left Cologne, and came to reside in Calais for a year.

Sunday, April 24th.

At half-past eleven we left Dessein's Hotel, and went to hear military Mass. The church of Notre Dame is not so large nor near so handsome as that at Boulogne. The great and principal Altar-piece is now building, and is dedicated to the Virgin. There is a fine organ and some paintings tolerably well executed, among which, according to my judgment, the Ascension ranks first. Mass was over in about an hour. We took an early dinner at M. de Flin's, and immediately repaired to the church to await the arrival of the King. The heart of the church is enclosed with iron rails, close to which we placed ourselves, standing upon chairs, that we might overlook the guards who were to be stationed within, and thus get a full view of His Majesty, for whom, in the middle of the enclosure, directly facing the Altar, a pretty throne was prepared. Under a canopy of white silk, embroidered and tied in festoons with gold, was placed a large armchair of crimson damask, and, at about three feet in front, a cushion of the same to kneel on—this, of course, was for the King. There were three more chairs of the same, two on the right of the throne, for the Prince of Condé and the Duke of Bourbon, and one on the left, for the Duchess of Angoulême. The whole was arranged with the greatest taste and elegance.

At half-past three, the *Royal Sovereign* yacht, with several brigs, barges, etc., entered the harbour; an open carriage was in waiting to conduct the Royal family to church, to which they immediately repaired. The band played, and the drums beat in the church so loudly that the windows really shook. "Vive le roi," "Vive Louis XVIII.," "Vivent les Bourbons" resounded from all parts. The Guards of Honour rushed in first with drawn swords, and formed themselves in rows; the King was attended by an immense train of English and French nobility; he walked under a canopy, supported by the clergy; the Prince of Condé, Duke of Bourbon, and the Duchess of Angoulême followed. Mass was then performed. The King was truly devout, and appeared much affected. Twelve young ladies of Calais, dressed in white crape over satin, sang the Te Deum.

Just before the conclusion of Divine Service we returned to our apartments, that we might avoid the crowd and have a good view of the procession to Dessein's Hotel, to which the carriage containing the Royal family was conveyed, or rather, dragged by the populace. The streets were sanded, and strewed with flowers, etc.; the houses almost covered with curtains, sheets, table-cloths, etc. Every window and balcony was crowded with countenances expressive of the greatest

joy and satisfaction. His Majesty seemed deeply to feel this warm reception ; he sat with hands clasped, and looked with smiles of content and gratitude on all who surrounded him.

Hearing he intended dining in public, we hastened to the hotel, where we found that ladies only were to be admitted : many were to take that opportunity of being introduced, and accordingly made themselves very smart for the occasion ; but, as we had no idea of receiving so great an honour, we did not think it worth while to change our dress. We entered a small court, adjacent to the dining-room, where we remained for half-an-hour, nearly suffocated. I never saw such an immense crowd of women. I really expected to be crushed. Here we might have remained for hours, had we not, fortunately, met with a gentleman of Mr. Morley's acquaintance, who being one of the Guards of Honour, conducted us through a private door to the dining-room. Miss Gaudoin, Mercy and I were together, but separated from the rest of our friends, who were all dispersed among the crowd.

We immediately placed ourselves behind the King's chair, on whose right hand sat the Duchess of Angoulême, who, hearing us address each other in English, turned round, asked if we were English ladies, and began to converse with us with the greatest affability. The Duke of Bourbon, who was seated next to the Duchess, shook hands with us and joined in the conversation. He was extremely polite, offered us refreshments from the table, and in gallantry was quite the Frenchman. The Duke introduced us to several persons near him, among whom were the Earl of Buckinghamshire and Lord Sidmouth. The latter was particularly pleasant. I stood nearest to the King, who having attended to our conversation on the happiness of the times, with the utmost condescension addressed himself to me, and said he never could repay the obligation he was under to the English, of whom he spoke with great affection. He asked if I wished to know the names of the company present, and then told me the titles of half the persons at table with him. I had the honour of speaking three different times to him during the hour we remained in the dining-room. We were likewise introduced to the Prince of Condé, who sat on the left of his Majesty.

Owing to the number of persons waiting to be admitted, the officers in attendance desired us to walk on, as we had been in the room nearly half an hour ; and although we had had permission of the Duchess to stay, they said they could not allow it. We were accordingly retiring, but a gentleman at table (whom we afterwards learnt was a duke) observed we were English ladies, and taking my hand, held it a considerable time, desired us to stand close to him, apologized that he could not be allowed to offer us his seat, and conversed with the greatest affability. He introduced us to a number of persons near him, and after some time desired one of the officers to conduct us to our old station behind the King's chair, and

to suffer us to remain there as long as we thought proper. The Royal family welcomed us back, and resumed their former affability.

About twelve toasts were then given with three times three, after which his Majesty gave "Vivent mes enfants et mes armes!" "God save the King" was then sung in French, during which he appeared much affected. In the last verse but one, the Duchess of Angoulême is highly complimented for her virtues and goodness, at which time the King kissed her hand and joined in the song. The twelve young ladies then came forward. One played the harp, while the others sang "Vive Henri Quatre," after which they were introduced, and with them we retired.

Calais was illuminated. Dessein's Hotel and the Town Hall were pretty, but nothing more remarkable. We supped at M. de Flin's, and slept at Madame le Mer's.

Tuesday, April 26th.

At twelve o'clock we went to Dessein's Hotel to see the King take his departure for Boulogne, and were fortunate in getting windows that overlooked the courtyard, where the carriages were waiting. That for the King was a coach with eight miserable-looking horses, and, what was still worse, rope-harness. He left Calais amidst the acclamations of the people, and was attended by two or three Mamelukes, Polish Lancers, with other military, besides the Guards of Honour, twenty-four in number, twelve on foot and twelve on horseback. Immediately after the departure of the Royal Family, we went over the apartments they had occupied. Those of the King were large and handsome; his bed was of crimson damask and uncommonly high. From the hotel we walked towards the pier, and meeting with Lieutenant Ashley, a friend of ours; he conducted us over the *Royal Sovereign* yacht, with which I was much delighted. The apartments are elegantly fitted up, beyond anything I ever saw.

We returned to M. de Flin's to dinner, and in the afternoon (as is the custom here) called on all those families who had kindly shown us attention during our stay at Calais. We slept in our old apartments at Dessein's Hotel.

Wednesday, April 27th, 1814.

We took an early dinner, and at half-past four embarked for England in the same Deal boat that brought us. We were six hours and a half on our passage, and miserably sick; but, thank God, arrived safe at Upper Deal at twelve o'clock at night.

HANNAH SOPHIA HOLLAMS.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

A Story Retold.

CHAPTER I.

HUGH RANDOLPH AT HOME.

AHOT bright morning in June, and market day at Helsingham, a quaint old-world town of some ten thousand inhabitants, in one of the Midland Counties.

Although the town-hall clock has only just struck nine, the stalls and booths in the market-place, and in the open space round the town pump, are beginning to be occupied by vendors of various kinds of merchandise—a miscellaneous surplusage of such as cannot afford to pay for, or do not care to occupy, stalls in the regular covered market, the entrance to which is through the gateway in the clock-tower.

One of the first to enter the market-place and to mix with the gathering crowd is old Mike Harrison, the blind fiddler and ballad singer, assisted carefully over the rough pavement by his little granddaughter Kitty. They are going just now to get their breakfast at some humble hostelry; but presently they may be seen about the town, always with a crowd round them, old Mike fiddling and singing, after a very rude fashion it must be confessed, while Kitty offers the ballads for sale, and pulls the old man through the higher passages with her shrill, quavering treble. As evening draws on, they will not fail to play and sing for a few minutes in front of the house of Doctor Hugh Randolph, which looks into the market-place. In return, Charlotte Herne, the doctor's cousin, will not fail to send them out the sixpence which she allows them every week, and which they have come at last to regard in the light of a small but settled income; for Charlotte herself is blind.

She is sitting there this sunny morning, close by one of the windows that look into the market-place, but shaded by the muslin curtains from the view of passers-by. The breakfast things are on the table, and she is awaiting the return of Dr. Randolph, who was called up several hours ago to attend a critical case.

Although she can see nothing of the busy scene that is being enacted outside, she knows almost every feature of it by heart. Years ago, when a girl, and before she had lost her sight, she used to accompany her mother to Helsingham market; and her retentive memory has stored up the details of many a visit on bright, sunny mornings like the present one; and in small provincial towns the

A Guilty Silence.

ordinary features of out-door life vary but little from one year's end to another. Then her cousin Hugh has so often sketched in for her the little odd features of the scene, that its every detail seems known to her, and Hugh is almost as good as another pair of eyes to her when he is at home, and not thoroughly tired out with running after his patients.

Charlotte had not long to wait this morning before she heard Hugh's well-known knock. She had been brooding in the listless, moody way common enough with her when alone ; but the moment the sound of the knocker struck on her ear, her dark humour melted away like a dream. Starting with a glad smile from her seat by the window, she walked across the room and sat down in her place at the breakfast-table, and began to busy herself with preparations for the meal.

Few people, seeing her engaged thus, would have discovered that she was blind. She moved about the room so deftly and unhesitatingly, she knew so exactly where to find any object she might be in want of ; and just now her delicate little hands went in and out among the cups and saucers, and played around coffee-pot and cream-jug so lightly and dexterously, that any stranger, not habitually a close observer, might readily have been excused for overlooking Charlotte's misfortune. Anyone, however, who had been in the habit of mixing much among blind people, would not have failed to notice the lingering, almost caressing, touch by means of which her fingertips, educated to a nicety of feeling such as people who are blessed with eyesight can scarcely comprehend, told her the meaning and position of every object with which they came in contact.

Charlotte Herne was twenty years of age, but in size and general appearance she did not look older than many a girl of fifteen. It was not merely that she was short of stature, but she was altogether so diminutive and fragile-looking that it was difficult to believe that the slight creature before you was not the mere child you took her to be, but a woman in years, and a woman in heart and brain ; and if her mind had grown somewhat morbid and askew under the pressure of her terrible misfortune, one could hardly wonder that such should be the case.

Five years had now come and gone since that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon on which she was struck by lightning while taking shelter under a tree, and was picked up senseless and blind. Her senses came back to her, sharpened and intensified, it may be, by what she had undergone ; but those skilled in such matters avouched that her eyesight was lost for ever. She was not what is commonly called "stone-blind." For instance, her eyes could tell her whether the morning was dull or bright, or whether a room was lighted by candles or gas ; but beyond that at present, whatever secret hopes she might cherish in her own mind as regarded the future, they would scarcely serve her.

From the day she was struck by lightning she had ceased to grow. There was, however, one singular exception to the general youthfulness of Charlotte's appearance. The rich, heavy sheaf of her chestnut hair, of which she had been so proud ever since she could remember, had, from the date of her misfortune, been slowly but surely turning grey. Its coils were still as thick and heavy as ever they had been ; it still, when combed out, fell in a rippling veil below her waist ; but by this time its once rich colour had faded to a dull ashen grey, lustreless and dead, like the hair of some middle-aged woman, blanched as much by tribulation as by years. But Charlotte knew nothing of this slow change and decay ; she still deemed it, in gloss and hue, the same as she ever remembered it to have been, with flying gleams of gold in it whenever it caught a glint of sunshine. No one had the heart to tell her when it first began to change, and to undeceive her now would have been absolute cruelty ; so the fiction that the colour of Charlotte's hair was a beautiful chestnut was tacitly acceded to by everybody to whom Charlotte was known.

The youthful face, in its setting of ashen-grey coils and braids, had a strangely weird and old-world look, such as one could readily fancy the face of some withered beldame might put on who had drunk of the elixir of youth, and suddenly grown young again in everything but her hair.

And, indeed, there were times and seasons when Charlotte's young face had an indefinable something in its expression so ancient and witch-like as might well serve to carry out such a notion still further. Yet her face, although it could not be called beautiful, had always been accounted a comely one. Her features were small but regular, and their normal expression, especially observable when she was in the society of others, was one of girlish candour and simplicity. The little colour her cheeks might once have worn had vanished utterly ; her face was now of one clear, uniform paleness, resulting, in a great measure, from her sedentary, in-door mode of life, and not necessarily betokening any particular delicacy of constitution.

Those poor, blind eyes of hers, were, after all, her best feature. They were large, bluish-grey eyes, shaded by long silken lashes, and over-arched by delicate brows, that as yet retained all the gloss and colour of youth. They seemed to follow you about the room with a pleading, anxious gaze, that had something mournful in it when you came to know how sightless they were—a fact which you would never discover from the eyes alone. On sunny days they were usually protected by a green silk shade. Few people, except the domestics, ever saw Charlotte with it on, and the moment she heard Hugh's footsteps in the passage, she would slip it off and stuff it into her pocket, being probably possessed by an idea that it did not tend to enhance her personal attractions. This morning she had on a soft, floating dress of grey alpaca, the only pronounced bit of colour about her being the bow of pink ribbon that was tied loosely round her throat.

Charlotte's breakfast arrangements were just completed when Hugh Randolph came into the room, as fresh and smiling from his cold-water douche as though he had only just arisen, instead of having been up since two a.m. in attendance on a difficult case. Charlotte's face lighted up again in the same indescribable way as she turned towards the door to greet him.

A tall, well-built young man of eight-and-twenty this Dr. Hugh Randolph ; with a long and somewhat thin face ; with large, straight, clear-cut features ; with a clear, olive complexion, and short, straight, black hair ; clean-shaven, and guiltless either of beard or moustache. A cool, self-reliant man evidently, and one who would not readily lose his presence of mind in any emergency ; with yet a nameless, intangible something about him that seemed to invite confidence, and generally succeeded in winning it. A man possessed by a genuine love for his profession, who had years ago determined, in his own mind, to rise in the world by means of it, and was now slowly, but surely, effecting his end.

"Good morning, Charley," said Hugh, with a pleasant smile, as he came into the room. Then, taking Charlotte's outstretched hand, he stooped and touched her forehead with his lips. "Silly child ! why did you wait breakfast for me ?" he added. "I might have been detained till noon for anything you could know to the contrary."

"I had a presentiment that you would be here before long," said Charlotte ; "and my presentiments generally come true. I said to myself, 'If he is not here by half-past nine, I will begin without him ;' but I thought you would be here for all that. What time did you leave home this morning ?"

"The clock was just striking two as I crossed the market place."

"Yes, I heard you get up, and creep downstairs with muffled footsteps, and let yourself out at the front door, although I did not know the hour. And I dare say you have gone all this time without anything to eat ! You are killing yourself, Hugh, I know you are."

"On the contrary, I am taking most excellent care of myself. I had a first breakfast hours before you were out of bed ; for when I got as far as Dixon's farm on my way to see old Mr. Yarnett, I found the men busy milking ; and when Dixon saw me, he asked me whether I would have a bowl of new milk, to which I said 'Yes, and a crust of home-made bread with it.' So I sat down for five minutes on the mossy wall, and made a hearty breakfast, and watched the sun come up, red and fiery, above the ridges of Charke Forest. But all this talk about myself, Charley, is making me oblivious of one little fact that must on no account be forgotten. Just tell me the day of the month, will you ?"

"It is the nineteenth of June," said Charlotte.

"And your birthday," answered Hugh. "I have not forgotten that, to-day, my little housekeeper—my adopted sister—is twenty

years old. And if you were my sister, dear, I could not think more of you than I do. A fortnight ago you gave me a lock of your mother's hair, with the request that I would have a little case made for it, in which it might be carefully preserved. I have had the hair braided and put into a gold locket, which, with the chain on which it hangs, I hope you will accept from me as a birthday present, together with my sincere wishes for many happy returns of the day."

Taking the locket and chain from his pocket, Hugh proceeded to fasten them round Charlotte's neck; then, laying a hand softly on each of her cheeks, and lifting up her face, he kissed her again, but this time on the lips.

Charlotte's white face flushed suddenly, as Hugh's lips touched hers, and then faded into whiteness again. For a few moments she was unable to speak.

"You are very, very kind, Hugh," she said at last. "I will wear the locket as long as I live."

With her slender fingers she felt the pattern of the chain, and the shape and size of the locket; and Hugh showed her how to open and shut it; and then she pressed it fervently to her lips, and hid it away, with a happy smile, in the bosom of her dress.

"And now for breakfast," said Hugh gaily, "for I am as hungry as a hunter. I'll tell you what I've been thinking, Charley," he went on, after a little while. "I have several times promised Mr. Chorlton that I would run over and see him at Hill Nook. So, as it's your birthday, and as the weather is fine, and as my patients just now are not very troublesome, I'll borrow Grimson's horse and gig this afternoon, and drive you over to the Nook. The outing will do you good. Mrs. Chorlton is a nice, motherly old lady; and I understand they have a famous garden there; and, like the young person in the nursery rhyme, you shall feast to your heart's content on 'strawberries, sugar and cream.'"

"That will be delightful, Hugh," said Charlotte, and the expression of her face showed that her words were sincere. "There—I cannot eat any more breakfast after what you have told me."

"Foolish child!" said Hugh. "You ought to be able to eat all the more in anticipation, as I do."

The postman's knock sounded below, and presently a letter was brought up for Hugh. He opened and read it in silence, and his face clouded as he read it.

"Another cup, Hugh?" said Charlotte.

"Thanks, no," he answered; and the changed tone of his voice struck her sensitive ear.

"You have heard bad news?" she said anxiously.

"Not exactly bad news," he replied. "This letter is from my London correspondent, he of whom I have spoken to you once or twice. He tells me that the search, begun twelve weary months ago,

is still unsuccessful, and he writes to know whether I am desirous of still going on with it."

"But you will give it up now, Hugh, will you not?" said Charlotte. "She may be dead, for anything you know to the contrary; or, even if still alive, so deeply hidden in that great world of London that you would never find her, were you to search for twenty years."

"It may be as you say," replied Dr. Randolph, as he rose from the table and began slowly to pace the room. "But I won't be discouraged just yet. I shall write back to my correspondent and bid him go on with the search as actively as before. Pray Heaven he may be successful at last!"

Neither of them spoke for a minute or two, and Hugh continued his slow pacing to and fro.

"What a little time it seems," he went on, "since I looked upon that girl as the one sole prize in life worth living for; and a still shorter time since I deemed that her falsehood had rendered me miserable for ever, and that my affections were dead, and buried in the grave she had dug for them. Yet here I am, as contented and happy, I dare say, as most of my neighbours; and if I have chosen to form no new tie of a similar nature, it is simply because I prefer to retain my freedom awhile, and not because my old wounds are still unhealed. Such is the philosophy, little one, that Time teaches us as we grow older. We are like children, many of us; we idolise a toy one day, only to cast it carelessly aside the next."

"She was unworthy of you, Hugh—in every way unworthy," said Charlotte; "and it makes me very glad to think that you have learnt to forget her."

"I have not forgotten her, Charley; that I shall never do. But the love I once thought would last for ever has gradually withered and died, without any wish or action of my own—almost, indeed, against my wish; for out of very shame, having made so many grand vows and promises to myself, I did strive to cherish it a little when I found it slipping from me. From which confession you will readily deduce one fact—that, even with the best intentions, we men are still but faithless creatures." He smiled a little bitterly, and then took up his hat. "But moralising here won't cure my patients," he added; "so good morning, Charley; and be sure to be ready by three o'clock."

CHAPTER II.

CHARLOTTE'S BIRTHDAY.

CHARLOTTE HERNE was the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman, who had farmed a small estate about a dozen miles from Helsingham.

Both her parents died within a few months of each other, shortly after she had lost her eyesight. Dr. Randolph's mother, at that time alive and managing her son's household, being Charlotte's nearest living

relation, the bereaved girl was at once transferred to Helsingham, and took up her abode under the Doctor's roof; and there she had remained ever since.

Mrs. Randolph had died about eighteen months before the opening of our story; and blind though she was, Charlotte had at once stepped into the old lady's place as manager of the little household, with Peggy Lawson, a family servant of thirty years' standing, to assist her. Charlotte had a small income of her own—about seventy pounds a year—which had been settled on her for life, so that she was in a measure independent of any one, and need not have stayed with her cousin Hugh unless she had been so minded.

But she was so minded, for she loved Hugh better than all the world beside. She had loved him ever since she was a girl of ten; at first, as a child loves, afterwards, as a woman loves. For, when Charlotte was ten years old, Hugh, at that time a lanky youth of eighteen, who had outgrown his strength, had been sent down to Dipplewade to recruit his health; and from that day to the present one, Charlotte's affection for him, growing with her growth, had known no whisper of change.

Dr. Randolph's house, which, together with the practice, he had bought from his predecessor, was considerably larger than the requirements of his modest household necessitated, so that when Charlotte came, and added one more to the family, and brought with her a considerable quantity of furniture from the old farm, he was able to set aside the whole of the upper floor for her service. This was just what Charlotte delighted in—to have a little domain of her own, sacred from intrusion, where she could wander about at her own sweet will—for she was one of the most restless of mortals—and be unwatched by prying eyes.

Of the rooms thus granted her, Charlotte had furnished two only, a spacious sitting-room and an airy bedroom. The rest she allowed to stand empty, but none the less did she consider them as a portion of her own territory; and at night especially, when one of her restless moods was on her, she would wander in and out from one empty chamber to another, for hours together, muttering fretfully to herself, or restlessly counting over and over again the shining beads of her amber rosary. She knew well that the stout oak floors of the old house would allow no sound of her light footfall to disturb the slumbers of those below. As a further line of demarcation between her domain and the rest of the house, she had had a green baize door fixed at the top of the flight of stairs leading to her rooms, which door she could bolt inside at pleasure. But her most precious moments were those which she spent with Hugh at meal-times, in the family room below; and sometimes of an evening, when Hugh had no outdoor engagements, she would creep down to the sitting-room for an hour or two, and persuade him to read to her, or draw him on by insidious questions to talk of himself, his hopes

and prospects. But such golden occasions were rare, for the young doctor's life was a busy one.

Charlotte's sitting-room was furnished with the pick of the chattels which she had brought with her from her old home; and if not exactly an elegant apartment, it was certainly wanting neither in comfort nor good taste. The two windows were shaded by green Venetian blinds, which were always kept lowered till evening, so that even on the brightest day in summer a cool twilight pervaded the room. The walls, too, were painted of a delicate green, and the carpet followed suit, for green was the colour most grateful to Charlotte's darkened but still sensitive eyes. On the walls hung several old-fashioned but good engravings, of which every line was traced on Charlotte's memory; they had been familiar to her from the day she could first remember anything. On the table was a freshly-cut bouquet. In one corner were placed several shelves, on which stood about fifty volumes, and near them was a shaded reading-lamp; in another corner stood a magnificent harp.

It was to this room that Charlotte Herne came on the morning of her birthday, as soon as Dr. Randolph had set out on his forenoon rounds.

Having closed the door behind her, she drew from her bosom the locket which her cousin had given her, and pressed it passionately to her lips at least a dozen times. Then she laid it against her cheek and against her heart, and caressed it as though it were a sentient thing.

"You pretty little darling!" she said; "I will wear you always for his sake. Yes, even in my coffin you shall still rest on my heart. Oh, Hugh, how I love you!" she went on, still speaking aloud, as she had a habit of doing when alone in her own room; "but how much do you care for me, I wonder? You love me as you might love a sister, and no more. It is something—much—to know that your heart is vacant, and that your days of mourning for the flown bird which you once cherished there so fondly are over at last. Will any other bird, I wonder, ever tenant the empty cage? Not you, my poor blind Charlotte; not you, my girl! Don't you cherish such a foolish dream! There is a tiny fiend whispering [something in my ear. Speak up, little devil, and let me hear what you have to say. 'Hope, and be patient!' Oh yes, we know all about that, don't we, Charlotte? But then it's such weary, weary work!"

She ended with a burst of shrill, metallic laughter, such as she rarely ventured upon, except when alone; and having again kissed the locket, she replaced it in the bosom of her dress.

"And now for an hour or two at my elegant uselessness," resumed Charlotte, as she took from her workbasket a half-finished antimacassar. "Two more days will see this finished, and one more will be added to the heap I have already done. In another year or two

I shall have thoroughly stocked all my friends and acquaintances with these proofs of my industry and goodwill. After that, I suppose I must take to working for the charity-bazaars. If some of my smiling lady-friends, who profess to take such a deep interest in poor blind me, only knew what black, viperous thoughts were battling in my heart while my fingers were busy in their behoof, would they care, I wonder, to decorate their drawing-rooms with my handiwork? Big and little, I work over twenty of these pretty trifles a year. Twenty a year for thirty years comes to just six hundred—a woman's life to be spent in the manufacture of six hundred antimacassars! Ah! but there's one comforting thought: I sha'n't live thirty years, nor twenty, nor ten, nor five. Just now the flame burns strong and steady, but one day there will come a sudden puff, and in a moment all will be dark. Such is the presage of Charlotte Herne."

For a quarter of an hour after this, Charlotte's crochet-needle moved in swift silence, while her mind seemed intent on counting her stitches. Then a pause, for her thoughts were too restless and busy to allow her to work without frequent breaks.

"Yes, but a very little while," she said, "and people will speak of me in the past tense; if, indeed, they ever speak of me at all. How few they are who will miss me! none who will mourn for me. I fancy I hear little Miss Medway discoursing over her tea-table to some spinster as ancient as herself. 'That article,' she will say, 'was worked by Charlotte Herne, and I set some store by it for her sake. She was blind, you know, and died young, poor thing! and it was almost a mercy she was taken at such an early age.' That is the way people in health always talk of us afflicted ones, whether we be lame, or blind, or dumb, or in whatever way we may differ from happier mortals. As if they knew! As if life had not its moments of sweetness to the veriest wretch that crawls! Then there's Hugh! How will he think of me after I shall be gone? I cannot tell—I cannot tell! I only know that if he loved me, were it ever such a wee morsel, I should want to live a thousand years."

A dark frown rested on her child-like face as she spoke thus. Tearing away her mind with a wrench, as it were, from the gloomy thoughts over which she had been brooding, she set resolutely to work again, counting stitch after stitch, for nearly half an hour. The task on which she was engaged had evidently a soothing effect upon her mind. The hard, set look faded slowly from her face, giving place to an expression of almost infantine gaiety. Suddenly she started up and flung her work across the floor.

"Not another stitch will I do this day!" she exclaimed. "Is it not my birthday? And is not Hugh going to drive me to Hill Nook Farm? And for one, two, three happy hours I shall have him all to myself!"

She crossed the room and sat down by her harp, and let her fingers wander caressingly over the strings.

"Come, old friend," she said, "your sweet voice shall talk to me awhile."

This was Charlotte's one accomplishment, but one that she rarely practised, except when alone. She had a sort of shy jealousy of playing before others, as though by so doing she were afraid of vulgarizing, and rendering common in her own eyes, this the most refined and cherished solace of her lonely hours. She played and sang none but sacred music—pieces which her mother had taught her, and which she had played and sung over and over again when a happy child at home. And it was strange to notice with what rapt fervour this girl, who seemed to have so little of reverence or of religious aspiration in her composition, would chant the words of the grand old Psalmist ; or what tenderness she would infuse into her singing of the simple hymns, which, years ago, she had been used to hear sung by the congregation of the little out-of-the-way conventicle which she attended with her mother.

Charlotte's voice was a deep contralto, of narrow compass, almost masculine in some of its lower notes, but with a rich, liquid sweetness higher in the scale ; such music, taking it all in all, as you would never have imagined the delicate little creature before you capable of producing.

After preluding awhile on the harp, as if to gather inspiration, Charlotte began to chant the Twenty-third Psalm in a low, rich voice, that grew in strength and volume as she went on. When she had come to the end of it, she let her head droop forward on to the instrument, and began to speak, almost in a whisper.

"How the old days come back to me when I sit down to play," she murmured ; "the old, happy days before I was blind ! Just now, when I was singing, I seemed to hear my mother's voice joining in now and again, as she went about her work in the kitchen. I heard my father's footsteps as he came up the little paved pathway to the back-door. My canary was fluttering in its cage ; my kitten was basking on the window-sill ; and through the open casement came the scent of new-mown hay. All conjured up by a few bars of familiar music ! O mother, mother ! why did you not take me with you ? Why did you leave me here to fight this hard battle alone ?—alone, and in a darkness that has no hope of dawn on earth. Are you, can you be happy in that heaven to which you are gone, without your child, without your one pet lamb, as you used to call me ? What a mystery it is ! Some day, perhaps, it will all be made clear."

She was roused from her reverie by the sound of the clock striking two. She was back among sublunary things in a moment.

"Only an hour, and Hugh will be here !" she exclaimed. "Which dress must I put on ? My sprigged muslin would be most suitable for the day, and yet——"

And with her finger on her lips, and her mind intent on the knotty

question of what to wear, Charlotte went downstairs to look after some luncheon.

An hour later, Charlotte, seated by the side of Hugh, was being borne swiftly through the narrow streets of Helsingham, on her way to Hill Nook Farm. A few minutes sufficed to see them clear of the town and its suburbs, with the fresh country breeze blowing about them, and mitigating, to some extent, the severity of the June sunshine.

The drive was delightful, and all too soon they found themselves at the Farm, where a cordial welcome awaited them. It was an old-fashioned, white house, set in a perfect nest of greenery, with garden and orchard and far-stretching pasture lands; and was sheltered at the back by a great lichen-covered cliff, among the crannies of which a whole colony of birds had built their nests, in utter defiance of all the marauding boys of the neighbourhood. All these things were duly pictured by Hugh for Charlotte's behoof. Mrs. Chorlton would fain have installed her guests in the best parlour, an apartment never made use of except on occasions of high state and ceremony; but Hugh would not hear of it, and vowed that he would never come again if they made such a stranger of him. So, while he and Mr. Chorlton went to inspect the farm and the live-stock, Charlotte, under charge of her hostess, was installed in a huge easy-chair, between the fire and the window, in the family room, an apartment with sanded floor and whitewashed walls, and a ceiling from which depended several huge hams swathed in paper. A wonderfully home-like room, especially in winter time, when the immense fireplace, at which a whole ox might have been comfortably roasted, was filled with dry logs, that blazed and crackled and shone warm and ruddy through the diamond-paned window—never curtained in those primitive parts—for half a mile or more adown the dark valley.

Mrs. Chorlton chatted with Charlotte in a kind, motherly way, while busying herself with the preparation of certain delicate tea-cakes, for the manufacture of which she was justly famed. Then the gentlemen came in, and tea, that most sociable of meals, was duly discussed, with the assistance of some delicious Hill Nook cream and fresh home-made butter. After tea, the heat of the day being somewhat tempered by this time, they all voted for the garden; and there, in an arbour trellised with honeysuckle and sweetbriar, Charlotte feasted on strawberries, sugar and cream, as promised her by Hugh; while our young doctor and his host paced the rose-scented alleys, smoking their cigars, and settling the difficulties of the nation to their own satisfaction.

Not the least enjoyable part of the day's proceedings was the ride home through the balmy twilight; but they parted at the door, not to meet again till next day. Dr. Randolph had been sent for in haste an hour ago, and could not now afford to delay another minute. Charlotte walked upstairs to her own room in a dreamy

mood, carrying her bonnet by its strings. Just then she felt supremely happy. So ended her birthday—a day to be looked back to, in the dark time that was slowly but surely coming upon her, as to something that could never be repeated.

CHAPTER III.

AT IRONGATE HOUSE.

ON the morning of this same nineteenth of June on which we have made the acquaintance of Dr. Randolph and Miss Charlotte Herne, that eminent scholastic establishment for young ladies, known as Irongate House, was in a state of uproar and confusion that would have amply justified any member of the Lunacy Board who might have stepped in by accident, and been ignorant as to the cause of it, in issuing immediate instructions for a commission to sit and inquire into the state of mind of Miss Easterbrook and the whole of her boarders.

But scarcely could anyone not a stranger have crossed the threshold before he would have had shouted and dinned into his ears, by a charivari of shrill youthful voices, the tremendous fact that this was breaking-up day for the Midsummer holidays. Adieu for six long weeks to themes, exercises, tasks and compositions of every kind ; to Mademoiselle Perrin's irregular verbs ; to Miss Davenant's terrible compositions on English history ; and to Madam Easterbrook's system of rising with the lark, which young ladies of an indolent habit voted a terrible nuisance, and vowed they would make up for it by lying in bed till noon as soon as ever they should reach home.

Yes, that was the magic word—home ! which this morning filled each of those youthful hearts with a whisper of gladness. Therefore for a few brief hours was Irongate House like a nest of happy singing-birds ; therefore to-day was discipline flung to the winds, and authority trampled under foot, and all petty jealousies, and school-girl animosities forgotten in the common joy.

Even portly Miss Easterbrook herself—there is no denying the fact—is infected with the general contagion of gladness, and seems to fancy that her own school-days have come back again. She is actually wandering from room to room in the old mansion in a morning wrapper—a state of things never witnessed by the oldest boarder, except on occasions like the present—looking after the packing of the young ladies' trunks, and seeing that everything is in readiness for their departure ; having some absurd question or outrageous conundrum for each room that she goes into ; and marking her progress with lavish showers of delicious bonbons, done up in little packets with French mottoes outside.

Irongate House, formerly the home of the Derewoods, one of the

oldest county families, now Miss Easterbrook's establishment for young ladies, stood on a pleasant, healthy elevation in the pleasantest suburb of Helsingham.

Although it would have been considered as a very inconvenient residence by any family accustomed to the space and airiness of a large modern house, yet Miss Easterbrook found it admirably adapted for scholastic purposes. All those queer little rooms on the second floor, with the casements and the diamond-paned windows, into which you were liable to stumble head first if you happened to forget the two steps leading into each of them from the corridor, served admirably as dormitories ; then, for a general class-room, what could be better than that large and noble dining-room, panelled with black oak, although, to be sure, the ceiling was somewhat lower than accorded with modern ideas on the subject ? and nobody could deny that the old library made a capital refectory. Then there was space enough for special class-rooms, whenever such were needed ; and Miss Easterbrook was still able to have separate apartments of her own, shut out from the rest of the house.

As for the house itself, it was built of red brick, with stone mullions and copings, and a funeral-looking urn by way of ornament at each corner of the roof. It stood in its own grounds, which, although of small extent, were laid out in a pleasant, old-fashioned style, and shut in on three sides by a high brick wall—a further advantage where there were so many giddy fledglings to be kept from harm. On the fourth side stood a pair of large iron gates, of elaborate workmanship, with a stretch of high railing on either hand, between which and the house grew several clumps of immense evergreens, so thick and so high as effectually to preclude all impudent prying from the neighbouring road into precincts rendered sacred to the uses of the dread Minerva.

Miss Easterbrook was far from being what, in these days, would be called a highly-educated woman, and no one knew her deficiencies in this respect better than she did. To do her justice, she never represented herself to the parents and friends of her pupils as anything more than a motherly ignoramus, who would do her best to look carefully after the health, the morals and the deportment of the young ladies committed to her charge, leaving them to be brought forward by the efficient teachers whom she engaged, in whatever branches of education might be deemed advisable. It was universally agreed that Miss Easterbrook's terms were very high, and yet her school was the most popular of any in Helsingham or its neighbourhood ; and it at once gave a girl a sort of standing, when she was brought out in the circles of the little town, to say of her that she had been "finished" at Irongate House.

By three o'clock the boarders had all gone, some one way, and some another, and an unwonted stillness reigned through the grim old mansion.

Miss Easterbrook, having witnessed the last departure, hastened

off with a sigh of relief to her own room, there to try on the three new dresses which Miss Sharp, the milliner, had just sent up, and to look after the packing of her trunks ; for she herself was to start by the five p.m. train for London, on her way to Hastings, at which place of fashionable resort she generally spent the summer vacation.

We all know that not to mortals is it given to be entirely happy, and Jane Easterbrook was no exception to the rule. Putting aside the petty annoyances incident to her profession, which, indeed, never made much impression on her, Miss Easterbrook may be said to have had only one great trouble, but it was one that had lain heavily on her mind for years, and against which she had bravely but ineffectually struggled.

The name of the demon by which she was tormented was Corpulence.

In other words, Miss Easterbrook was getting fatter year by year ; and, as she herself said, there was no knowing when this state of things would cease, or how soon her waist might disappear entirely ; so that latterly she had grown quite morbid—that is to say, as morbid as a person of her jolly temperament could possibly become—through much brooding over this painful subject. Day and night it dwelt in her thoughts ; it haunted her dreams ; it affected her appetite ; it lent an acidity to her temper foreign to her normal good-nature ; and yet with all this, she seemed to become stouter as the summer advanced, and this bright June afternoon she was sitting, red in the face, panting for breath, and feeling half suffocated, in one of her new dresses, into which, after many efforts, Louisa, her maid, had succeeded in inducting her.

"I never can bear to wear it, of that I'm certain!" said Miss Easterbrook, speaking in a slightly sepulchral voice, as she wiped the perspiration from her forehead.

"Oh, yes, you will, ma'am," replied the confident Louisa. "You see it's different with you this afternoon. You've been on your feet all this hot day, worriting yourself with looking after the young ladies, and have put yourself out of the way a little ; all of which makes the veins swell and one's things fit tight. If you had only tried on this dress first thing after breakfast, ma'am, when you was cool and comfortable, you would have found it a beautiful fit."

"There may be some truth in what you say, Louisa : especially as Miss Sharp states in her note that she is sure I shall find the dresses easy and comfortable."

"Oh yes, ma'am, it's as I say, you may depend on it ; and you know yourself, that you've only gained two pounds in weight during the last four weeks."

"And quite enough too, Louisa, when you consider how heavy I was before. I did intend to travel in this dress, but that's quite hopeless now. I'm afraid you will have to let it out a little when we get to Hastings."

"I hope not, ma'am. You will find the sea air and the bathing very bracing. If anything, your dresses will get too large."

"You forget, Louisa, that the sea-breeze always gives me such a terrible appetite, so that one benefit counteracts the other. However, get this dress off me as quickly as possible, or I shall be serving it the same as I did that blue silk at the picnic last autumn, when all the hooks-and-eyes gave way with a little plop, one after another, from the waist right up to the shoulders, and me sitting there with nothing over my dress but an open-work black-lace shawl, that showed the figure through quite plainly."

"I suppose I must pack up the three dresses as they are, ma'am?" said Louisa.

"Yes, certainly; perhaps they may not feel quite so tight next time I put them on; in any case, there is no time to have them altered before we go. Stay a moment, though; I think I will try on that shot silk again, and just step downstairs and ask Miss Davenant how she likes it. No one can deny that Miss Davenant has excellent taste in dress."

Louisa turned up her nose, and sniffed a little at the idea of Miss Davenant's opinion being of consequence to anybody.

"Get your own trunk completed, and the direction cards made out, while I go down to Miss Davenant; and tell Mrs. Greene to have a cup of tea ready in a quarter of an hour."

Miss Easterbrook paused for a moment at the top of the stairs, while a pleasant smile stole over her ample, good-natured face.

"I know that it's very foolish of me," she murmured to herself, "but I cannot help wondering whether that Major Styles will be at Hastings this season. His attentions last year were certainly very marked, although his words might be considered somewhat ambiguous. I am afraid he is very poor, and that he has little to live on besides his half-pay—but that need not matter much; and I am nearly certain that his hair and whiskers are dyed. Well, well, we shall see. But Jane Easterbrook will never throw herself away on a spendthrift or a *roué*."

She went downstairs slowly and thoughtfully, and then along a corridor leading towards the back of the house, out of which several doors opened into different rooms. She knocked at one of these doors, and on a pleasant voice saying "Come in," she entered, and Miss Davenant turned with a smile to greet her.

C H A P T E R I V.

MISS DAVENANT.

"I HAVE come to bid you good-bye, my dear, and to ask you how you like my new dress," said Miss Easterbrook as she advanced into the room.

Miss Davenant was busily engaged on the half-yearly accounts, which would follow the young ladies to their homes in the course of a post or two, and would cause sundry grave papas to elevate their eyebrows, and growl out something about "girls being such an awful expense." She laid down her pen, and contemplated her visitor for a moment or two before speaking.

"I like your dress very much," she said at last; "both style and material suit you exactly. I hope that you will enjoy yourself while you are away. At what hour do you start?"

"The train leaves at five, so that I have no time to spare. I am glad you like the dress. Do put away that ledger for this afternoon. I never can bear to see anybody at work on breaking-up day. Remember, I leave you absolute mistress of Irongate House and all there is in it till I come back. I do hope you will take care of your health while I am away, and contrive to get a bit of colour into those pale cheeks of yours; although, mind you, I would give a hundred pounds this minute to be as thin as you are. I went up to Dora Morrison's room about half an hour ago, and I quite agree with Dr. Randolph that the child is coming on nicely. Meanwhile, I leave her with every confidence in your hands. And now good-bye, dear; good-bye, and God bless you!"

And, with a fervent kiss on each cheek, and a cordial grasp of the hand, the good-natured Miss Easterbrook took her departure.

Left alone, Miss Davenant finished the account on which she was at work at the moment of Miss Easterbrook's entrance; then closing the fat little ledger, she drew an easy-chair in front of the open French window, and sat down, with an air at once weary and despondent. On a table close to her elbow lay the current number of the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*"; a volume of Spanish exercises, which language Miss Davenant had lately begun to study; Schiller's "*Gedichte*," and the third volume of the newest novel procurable at the Helsingham circulating library.

Other evidences of Miss Davenant's tastes were visible in various articles of her own property scattered about the room.

Over the fireplace hung a proof engraving of the Cambridge portrait of Tennyson, flanked on each side by an original sketch by Stothard, which, together with the bronze timepiece of classical design, but irregular habits, had been picked up by Miss Davenant among the London curiosity shops. The timepiece was supported by a couple of vases, genuine antiques, which had been dug up at Herculaneum—articles that Miss Davenant set great store by. Her property, too, was the rather shabby-looking piano in the corner, which had yet a voice of sweetness all its own, that its mistress's touch could evoke at will; and the marble bust of Dante which fitly crowned the little bookcase, and which had come to her, a present, from Florence itself.

In the middle of the table there stood, this afternoon, a shallow

vase nearly filled with tiny bouquets of freshly-gathered flowers, which had been left by home-going pupils, as tokens of affectionate regard when they came in to bid Miss Davenant good-bye. There were other tokens near at hand of the same kindly feeling—in the collar and pair of cuffs, elaborately embroidered by the skilful fingers of Miss Augusta Darrell ; in an ivory and silver penholder ; in a book-marker cunningly worked ; and in an illuminated Latin prayer, done by clever little Miss Browne.

A pleased expression came over the face of Miss Davenant as her eyes wandered over these tokens of goodwill which had come direct from the hearts of their youthful givers.

"They like me," she murmured to herself, as she took up one of the bouquets and smelt at it ; "they like me, for all I set them such difficult tasks to learn ; and I am glad of it."

A woman tall and slender—thin, some people would have called her—and thirty-five years old, was this Margaret Davenant, with whom we shall have so much to do in the following pages. Her features were finely cut, and of a regularity almost classical ; but the cheeks were more sunken than they should have been at her age, and there were dark circles under her eyes, and a pinched expression about the thin, mobile lips, which told a tale of secret cares preying on a nervous, highly-strung organization, wearing it away by slow attrition, endured year after year with a restrained patience that never found a voice except in darkness and solitude.

The long black hair was brushed back from the forehead, and fastened with a comb in a great bunch at the back of her head. The black eyebrows were thick and almost straight, becoming straighter whenever the large black eyes below them flashed with anger or defiance, and more arched whenever the face over which they dominated was lighted up with one of Margaret's rare smiles. Her hands were long, tapering, and diaphanous, and she had a trick of rubbing them slowly one within the other whenever she sat thinking intently, or of turning round and round the worn turquoise ring which no one ever remembered to have seen her without. She was dressed in thick black silk, her customary wear ; and round her neck was a slender gold chain, from which hung a tiny watch, hid away in some mysterious pocket among the folds of her dress. Whether Margaret Davenant sat or stood, there was about her that indefinable air of grace and distinction which is one of Nature's rarest gifts to man or woman.

The patch of sunlight in the garden broadens slowly as the afternoon advances, creeping over grass-plot and flower-bed, brightening the clumps of evergreens one by one, and stealing imperceptibly up to the threshold of the open window, and so into the room where Margaret Davenant sits musing in melancholy mood.

As she sits there, with her chin resting in the hollow of one hand, she seems to be gazing earnestly into the garden, but her eyes, wide

A Guilty Silence.

40

open though they are, note no feature of the peaceful scene ; her mind is busy with far other pictures, and she is dead for the time being to all outward impressions. How quiet the house is this afternoon, now that all its chattering occupants have taken flight !—a stillness that seems almost holy from its very rarity broods over the old place. Now and then a distant door is heard to shut ; and at intervals the faint tones of a female voice singing some pensive strain steal into the room : it is the voice of Esther Sarel, who is singing one of the many hymns she knows, as she goes sedately about her work.

Margaret is more dull and melancholy than usual to-day. All these farewells and departures for happy homes have affected her spirits, she hardly knows why. A sense of desertion is upon her ; for her no home will open wide its doors, no dear ones bid her welcome. But this is an old feeling, and one with which she has been familiar for years. To-day it shall not get the mastery of her, and she crushes it back, low down into her heart, and will have none of it. To-day, if ever, she ought to be happy, for has she not six weeks of freedom before her—six long, pleasant weeks to call her own ? But they will soon come to an end, and then her slavery will re-commence ; and so, from year to year, she must pace the same weary round without hope of change, till she fades into an old woman and the end comes. But this thought, likewise, she soon puts impatiently on one side ; it is a demon whose face she has seen before, and she tramples it underfoot without remorse. Ridiculous at this time of day to cry out that the yoke is heavy, and that the harness chafes. She has borne them through the freshness of morning and through the noon tide heats, and now, when the shadows begin to lengthen and the evening no longer seems far off, shall she lift up her voice and acknowledge that her burden is greater than she can bear ? Were it not wiser, and better in every way, to toil cheerfully onward till night should come, bringing with it rest and inmost peace for such as have laboured faithfully to the end ?

More than an hour has passed while she has been sitting thus, with fixed, brooding eyes that gaze out from under their straight thick brows without seeing anything of what is before them. But she breaks up her musings at last, not without an effort, and turning to her desk, takes pen and paper in hand. "I will write to Adela," she says to herself, "and tell her something of what weighs so heavily on my mind. It will do me good to confide to another—and that other my oldest friend—the secret care that gnaws me as the fox did the Spartan lad. They say that half the sting is taken out of a trouble when it is told ; but that depends, I suppose, on the kind of person to whom one tells it."

Dipping her pen in the inkstand, Miss Davenant wrote as under :—

"My dear Adela,—I believe that, according to promise, I should

have written to you by the mail a fortnight ago ; and that, consequently, I ought now to begin my letter in the orthodox fashion, by enumerating a long string of excuses for my seeming neglect. But I am not going to do anything of the kind. I did not write you at the time agreed upon because I did not ; which, as I take it, is a good and sufficient reason for any woman to give. I might add that, at the time I promised to write, I was suffering from one of my old fits of nervous irritability ; and you remember what they are. Sometimes, at such seasons, I believe that if I had the power I should stop the world from ever again turning on its axis, and never let there be another sunrise. Oh ! the torture, when I am thus mentally at war with myself and every one, of being obliged to listen to the lessons, and correct the exercises, of a pack of stupid girls, whose intellects, as far as anything useful is concerned, are, five times out of six, of the most meagre and sterile kind !

" And now that I have thus handsomely made my excuses, I may be permitted to congratulate you on your brightening prospects ; and that I do so most gladly and sincerely you will not doubt. After your many trials, you seem at last to have found a home, such as, years ago, we, in our girlish inexperience, used fondly to imagine were plentiful as blackberries. But you are one of that happy class with whom a little kindness goes a great way. In your place, I am afraid that I should turn cold and hard, and make myself thoroughly disagreeable, and fancy, foolishly enough, no doubt, that I was being patronized, and set up my quills accordingly. Depend upon it, Adela, it is a happy faculty, that of being able always to look at the sunny side of the apple ; and that is just what you have done through life.

" How I should like to make the acquaintance of your Yankee Crighton and his charming family ! To hear of an American merchant as being liberal, educated, and a thorough gentleman, has for me an element of novelty ; but I am quite willing to believe that my mental portrait of the character was incorrect and out of drawing, and have, consequently, deposed it to make room for your pen-and-ink sketch of Mr. Leffler. How little this Mr. Leffler, or his wife, or the young ladies his daughters, imagine what a shrewd, but kindly observer of themselves and their doings they have under their roof, in the person of that quiet, demure, spectacled, oldish young person, known as Mademoiselle Adela Reichenbaum, who has engaged, in consideration of a certain number of dollars per annum, to put certain artistic finishing touches to the education of the aforesaid young ladies—delicate strokes, which the exigencies of real life will, in all probability, rub out utterly before they are half-a-dozen years older ! But by that time the grand object of all this ornamentation and superficial veneer-work will have been caught and secured. What that object is, you know as well as I.

" I have just styled you an 'oldish young person,' and I hasten to

condone the offence, if such it be, by expressing my readiness to put myself in the same category. Yes, your Margaret is five-and-thirty years old. Alas and alack-a-day ! Not infrequently of a morning do I find a white hair among my ebon locks ; but I pluck up the noxious intruders as soon as seen, and strive to cajole myself with the idea that I still feel as young at heart as I did the day I was twenty.

" Of all that youthful sisterhood—how many of us were there ?—ten or a dozen at the least—who, on a certain idle afternoon (you remember well the day), sitting together in an arbour in the garden of the Pension Blisset, and discoursing of many things, registered among themselves a mild vow of perpetual spinsterhood, but you and I, my Adela, have remained true to the obligation. Of that gay, laughing band, three or four, alas ! are dead ; while all the others, with the two honourable exceptions already named, have taken upon themselves the yoke of slaves, and are married. It is just possible that a censorious world might hint that it is not our fault that we have not fallen into the same predicament. But you and I, *carissima*, know better than that. It is rather that we have refused to listen to the voice of the charmer, and have chosen instead to sit at the feet of the divine Pallas, and to slake our thirst at her ever-springing fountain, and to serve her humbly as handmaidens so long as heart and brain will work together.

" This is breaking-up day at Irongate House, and I have six long, delicious weeks of lazyhood before me. The pupils are all gone, except one little invalid, whom I am going to see presently ; Miss Easterbrook herself is on her way to Hastings ; and I and the servants have the grim old house all to ourselves. Why have I not followed their example and taken flight, you will probably ask. That is just what I am about to explain to you.

" Did I ever tell you the story of my life ? I think not, for there are certain passages in it that I could not bear to speak about to any one. Long as you have known Margaret Davenant, and 'tis fifteen years now since first we met, you have only known her as one who, like yourself, was compelled to earn her bread by imparting to others such scraps of knowledge as she herself, painfully and with much labour, had acquired. The most eventful chapter of my life-history had been spelt through, and burnt into my memory, before you and I met. Let me try to sketch it for you in outline.

" I was not always destined for a governess ; I was born to better things ; and up to the age of eighteen my life was one sunny round of gaiety and enjoyment. Brought up in a luxurious home a few miles out of London ; irregularly educated by a series of governesses who were distinctly given to understand that they must make the path of learning one of flowers also ; the pet of an ailing, beautiful mother, with whom I used to take delightful drives in the parks or along the leafy country roads, and to whom I used to read poetry in the

summer twilight ; the spoiled darling of an ever-smiling, elegantly dressed father, in whose ear I had only to whisper any request, however absurd, to have it immediately gratified, and who represented, in my eyes, that never-failing fountain of wealth of which, when a child, I had read in fairy tales : no wonder that to the Margaret Davenant of those days this world seemed a very charming place. When I was in my seventeenth year, Love came to crown the bright picture, in the person of a handsome, dark-eyed captain of dragoons. Ah, the happy days of that bright summer, how swiftly they speed away ! Had I ever looked forward at that time—which I did not, finding the present quite as much as I could deal with—I should certainly have inwoven with my dreams of the life before me the golden thread of a happy future. My future had been bright and unclouded ever since I could remember ; why should it not continue to be so through all the sweet seasons yet to come ? I had always been flattered and spoiled and beloved by those around me ; why should I not be so for ever ?

" My first real sorrow—and a big one it seemed at the time, although dwarfed into a trifle by after events—was my parting from my soldier-sweetheart, who was ordered with his regiment to India. It was agreed that, at the end of two years, he should sell out and return to England, and claim his bride. But at my age two years seemed a terribly long time. He had been gone but a few months when I lost my mother, who had been an invalid for years—a mother all the more fondly cherished, perhaps, in that she had of late yielded more and more to her daughter's loving tyranny, not having, indeed, sufficient strength left to oppose to the resolute will and undisciplined temper of that black-browed young person. Perhaps it was well that my poor darling went to her rest before the dark cloud, which was slowly accumulating its forces, burst over the heads of all whom she held dear on earth. When the evil day came, and it was not long in coming, I wept no more for my mother.

" Blow the third fell a month or two later. Papa, who had always been fond of horse-racing, became involved in difficulties ; in brief, for I cannot bear even now to write about that time, he was ruined, and obliged to go abroad. Everything we had was sold to satisfy our creditors ; and the day I was eighteen I found myself in a mean London lodging, with twenty pounds in my pocket, the produce of the sale of some of my mother's trinkets, and with a little sister three years old, who was dependent on me for everything. You have often heard me speak of my sweet Trix, though you have never seen her ; henceforth I was to be to her as mother and sister in one. Two years later you and I met for the first time, at the Pension Blisset ; and from that day the details of my life are known to you.

" You and I, my Adela, have both tasted of the bitter cup of poverty ; and I think that through all these years we have been drawn to each other not merely by a similarity of intellectual tastes,

but also by certain points of resemblance in our fortunes. We have both had to fight the world single-handed, with no one to fall back upon in case of defeat. We have each of us had a helpless loved one to struggle for as well as for ourselves : you an infirm mother ; I, a young sister ; and, thank Heaven ! neither of us has been utterly defeated.

"But all this time my darling Trix has been growing towards womanhood, and a few days hence she comes to me, her education completed, ready to take her place in the world. But what is that place to be ? That is the question which I ponder daily and nightly, but without being able to answer it to my own satisfaction. Trix has been educated carefully and well, on that point no expense has been spared ; and most young persons similarly circumstanced would fall naturally into the ordinary ruck of teachers or governesses, and so work out by degrees a humble position for themselves. But that is precisely the fate from which I am desirous of rescuing my sister. My own experiences as a governess have not been altogether happy ones ; and I am naturally anxious to shield Beatrice from any similar trials. Besides which, there is a radical difference in our dispositions, as no one knows better than myself. Trix has but little of that strong fixity of purpose and pig-headed obstinacy of will for which her elder sister is noted. In most of her qualities, both of head and heart, she is her mother over again : a nature joyous, volatile and impressionable ; easily moved to laughter, not difficult to melt to tears ; hardly formed to tread the thorny path of life alone ; needing the help of a strong heart and a wise head to preserve it at that uniform level of modulated feeling which society inexorably demands, even from those who touch but the hem of its garment. There is all the bright joyousness of a healthy, happy child about her, and almost as great an ignorance of the world—at least, of that busy, struggling, dusty world which has to fight for its daily crust in ten thousand different ways. To all this join the fact that Beatrice is very good-looking, and it will at once be admitted that I have cause for much anxious thought. I shudder at the idea of sending her out as a governess into the great world of London, with its innumerable temptations, many of them precisely such as are calculated to ensnare the fancy and delude the imagination of a girl so impressionable and inexperienced as Beatrice. On the other hand, supposing it were decided that she should not become a governess in a private family, but one opening would remain for her, and that would be to become a humble and ill-paid directress of feminine studies in Irongate House or some similar establishment. But what a fate for my sweet Trix, one of Nature's darlings, who seems fitted only for sunshine and felicity, to fade into the weary drudge of a dull schoolroom ! And yet, from what I can see at present, it seems imperatively necessary that one or the other of these modes of earning a living should be adopted by her, and at no very distant date either.

"Sometimes, in my many musings about my sister's future, the thought has crossed my mind that Trix might perhaps win a wealthy husband for herself, and so exorcise this nightmare of drudgery and indigence. But it is a dangerous theme on which to muse, conducive to day-dreams without end, if I would only allow myself to give way to such pleasant imaginings; and I have seen enough of the world to know that portionless girls, however charming they may be, rarely find rich suitors, unless, indeed, they can go out properly chaperoned into the great world of London, and allow a marketable value to be set upon themselves. But, as you know, I am possessed of no interest sufficient to effect for Trix an introduction into good society; and what chance would she have among the humdrum circles o' Helsingham of marrying any one better than a retired cheesemonger, or a fortunate linendraper?—good, worthy people, no doubt, but no match for a Davenant, however poor she might be. On the whole, as I cannot help confessing, the marriage scheme does not look very promising at present; so Beatrice must come while the question of her future still remains undecided.

"And now you know why I am still roosting under the eaves of the old house, instead of having taken wing for some seaside haunt or sunny northern glen. I feel that it has done me good thus to open my mind to you; but I want your advice; I need the aid of your calm, clear sense; so be a good girl, and write me a long letter as soon as possible. It was my intention to have given you some account of what I have been reading of late, but this letter is already spun out to such an unconscionable length, that I hasten at once to conclude. My poor little patient upstairs will think that I have quite forgotten her. So not another word, except that I remain as ever,

"Your affectionate friend,

"MARGARET DAVENANT.

"P.S.—I need hardly tell you that my handsome captain had quite forgotten my existence when he came back from India at the end of a couple of years."

CHAPTER V.

SEEN THROUGH THE LAURELS.

"A PLEASANT picture!" said Dr. Randolph to himself, as he was shown next morning into Miss Davenant's room, and paused for an instant on the threshold to note the features of the scene before him.

The room was perfumed by a freshly-gathered bouquet; the piano, and its accompanying music-book, both stood open; one of the two tables was littered with books and reviews; at the other sat Margaret, busily engaged on a pencil sketch. Scattered about this second table were a number of studies in crayon and pencil, with here and there a photograph, some large, some small, some representing bits of Con-

tinental life or scenery, while others were the likenesses of absent friends.

Margaret's face lit up with one of her rare smiles as she held out her hand to the young surgeon, who was attending temporarily at Irongate House during the illness of that aged and highly respectable practitioner, Dr. Bagshaw.

"I hope that my little patient is still improving," said Dr. Randolph, when the usual greetings were over.

"I am happy to think that she is," said Margaret, as she rang the bell. "Mrs. Greene will go upstairs with you, and I shall be glad to see you when you come down, if you have a few minutes to spare."

In less than five minutes the Doctor was downstairs again, and seated near the table where Margaret was still at work on her sketch. Having satisfied Miss Davenant that the young lady upstairs was progressing favourably, he began to turn over and examine the sketches on the table, first asking and obtaining permission to do so.

"I have seen you at this sort of work once or twice before," said Hugh, as he turned over the sketches one after another. "Are you fond of drawing?"

"I don't call it work, but play," said Margaret with a smile. "Yes, I am fond of drawing; it serves, now and again, to while away a leisure hour pleasantly, more especially during vacation time; for it is only when I have grown tired of reading that I care to exercise my pencil, and that does not often happen, except at such times as the present. Do any of your tastes lie in the same direction?"

"I flatter myself by thinking that they do, although my technical knowledge of art is very limited. If I were asked to explain critically why I liked a good painting or a good drawing, I should probably find myself at a loss for the proper terms; and if hard pressed, I could only say that it pleased my eye, and through my eye, I suppose, that inner sense of the beautiful which we all possess in a greater or lesser degree. What a charming head!" he added suddenly, as he took up one of the photographs. "And yet it seems familiar to me. I must have seen the original somewhere." He pondered for a moment or two, gazing earnestly at the portrait, while Margaret lay back in her chair, and watched him with an amused face.

"I have it! It is the likeness of your sister," he cried at length, with the air of one who has made a discovery.

"Yes, it is poor Trix's portrait," said Margaret. "Next time you come, you will probably find her here in person."

The Doctor's swarthy cheek flushed, and a sudden light came into his eyes as Margaret spoke. "Coming over on a visit, I presume?" he said. "Is Miss Beatrice going to make a long stay in Helsingham?"

"She will stay here altogether, so far as I know at present."

"But—but your sister is not (pardon my inquisitiveness) she cannot be coming to Irongate House merely as a teacher."

"Such is the mode she will probably adopt of earning a living."

"But, good heaven! you don't mean to say——," and then he broke off in some confusion. "Pardon me, Miss Davenant, it is no business of mine," he added; and then he replaced the portrait on the table, and sat very still for a minute or two, gazing out into the garden, but with eyes that saw nothing, unless it was some inward picture known to himself alone; while Margaret sat absently tapping the end of her pencil against her teeth, and watching him curiously from under her black eyebrows.

Hugh Randolph had met Beatrice Davenant in Paris, about a year before, on the occasion of his going there to place an orphan ward at school. On Margaret's recommendation, he had taken his ward to the school at which Trix was finishing her education, and had been introduced to that young lady by Margaret's wish, she being desirous of ascertaining, from a trustworthy eye-witness, that her sister was really as well and happy as, in her letters, she represented herself to be.

Dr. Randolph's reverie was broken by the striking of the little clock on the mantelpiece. He took up a book of travel that lay on the table, and began to speak of his own desire to go abroad; and how, ever since he was quite a boy, he had longed to visit Switzerland and Italy; how, at odd times, the wish to flee away into that vast strange world, of which he knew so little except from books, would even now come over him with almost irresistible force; and how faint the prospect seemed of a poor country surgeon, such as he was, ever being able to satisfy this craving of the mind. "I suppose it is a feeling that will wither up and die away in time," he said, "as so many other feelings do as we advance in life, till, at last, I shall come to think my own ingle nook the finest place in the world, and have no desire left to travel far beyond it. But you have seen the Alps, have you not, Miss Davenant?"

"Yes, I have seen the Alps several times," said Margaret. "Only please not to ask me what they are like. Indeed, if you do, I can only give you the same answer that old Mrs. Crace once gave me when I asked her what *s/he* thought of them, 'They are very nice, no doubt, for those who are fond of that sort of thing.'"

Dr. Randolph laughed, and then, discovering that it was time to go, he buttoned his coat, and took up his hat and gloves, but in a slow, lingering way very unusual with him.

"Let me find you a rosebud for your button-hole," said Margaret; and, taking a tiny pair of scissors, she stepped out through the French window into the garden. She dawdled about among the rose-bushes for a minute or two before she could find a bud to her mind, and so found herself behind the thick clump of laurels which fronted the window of her room. Some impulse, which she could not have defined to herself, induced her to part the leaves gently with one hand and peep through. She was just in time to see Dr. Randolph in the act of lifting her sister's portrait to his lips. Once—twice he

kissed it, and then he put it back on the table. Margaret's face darkened, and her black eyebrows came together ominously, as she gazed from her hiding-place: but her face was as unruffled as usual when she entered the room a minute later, and pinned the rose in Hugh's button-hole. Then the two shook hands, and the Doctor went on his way.

"Much as I like you, Hugh Randolph, and good a man as I believe you to be," said Margaret to herself as the door closed behind the young surgeon, "I don't intend to have any of your love-making here, sir. Beatrice Davenant must look higher than a poor country surgeon; or, if she has not wit enough to look after her own interests, I must do so for her. We have been labouring in the slough of poverty long enough; and she, at least, shall be lifted out of it, if a sister's hand and a sister's brain only prove strong enough to accomplish that end."

(To be continued.)



LIFE'S OPENING YEAR.

SHE stands—the little maid of three years old—
 In morn's pure light,
 Blue heavens above, white flowerets at her feet;
 No shade of night
 Crossing her path; no breath of winter frost,
 No autumn gloom,
 No heat of summer stealing near to blight
 Spring's tender bloom.
 Yet *must* they come. We know it, and we sigh,
 Though each may bring
 A richer blessing than the dainty gifts
 Of early spring.

So sweet the blossom that we dread the change
 From flower to fruit;
 The budding boughs are glad with singing birds,
 Red woods are mute:
 Yet is the blossom but the promised store
 Of future days,
 Yet are the songs but earnest of new life
 And fuller praise;
 And vain the thought to check the march of time,
 Or childhood's feet
 Hasting to that far country where alone
 Life is complete.

E. RHODES.

IN THE LOTUS LAND.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"THE BRETONS AT HOME," ETC. ETC.



CORSICAN PEASANTS.

some conveyance to meet us other than the lumbering omnibus which, at all times and in all places, is more or less of an infliction. We found our rooms perfection, but anything above and beyond the omnibus they chose to think superfluous. They had sent *two* omnibuses, and what more could be wanted by any reasonable mortal? Their omnibuses left nothing to be desired.

Whilst we were looking about and making enquiries, H. took a seat in one of them, calmly to await results. The immediate result was unexpected. Without warning or ceremony, apparently without rhyme or reason, the omnibus dashed off, and H. with it. This was a little alarming, for he was literally destitute of everything excepting

DARKNESS had long fallen upon the earth when the heavily-laden train steamed into Marseilles. The orange groves, the flowering cactus, the olive-yards and vineyards, the villa-crowned slopes and the encircling hills that had so often delighted our vision, all had to be taken for granted. The wonderful sea, flashing in the sunshine, deep, dark blue in the shadows, was invisible.

But we were glad to reach the old town, under any conditions, no matter what the time. After a rapid journey of nearly thirty hours, the prospect of rest seemed all in all to us. At the station there was endless bustle and confusion. We had written for rooms at the Grand Hôtel du Louvre, and for

the clothes he stood up in. We could only hope that we had not parted for good.

I was left on the platform, battling it out with the other omnibus conductor, who, in a vile and almost unintelligible patois, insisted that it was too late to get the luggage that night—a sheer waste of time ; they would fetch it early in the morning. This, of course, was preposterous. Though of the sterner sex, our baggage was as necessary to us, though perhaps not as precious, as the proverbial bonnet-box to the spindle side of creation. Finally we had our way, and we and the second omnibus rattled off : luggage and all.

On arriving at the hotel, it was a relief to find H. standing just outside the porte-cochère, still calmly awaiting events and the second omnibus. "Of course I knew we were not parted for ever," he laughed, in the quiet tones so necessary to good fellowship. "These awkward things never happen excepting to very funny people. All the same I was glad to see you rattle up, if only for the sake of supper."

My companion on this occasion was not the H. C., reader, whom you have met in Brittany and Majorca. The latter was in England, in attendance upon his aunt, Lady Maria, who had matrimonial designs in his favour, and, by a sort of domestic coup-d'état, meant to marry him to the great heiress, Miss Annabella de Courcy Flushington, whose fortune was confidently said to be not less than two millions. I may as well say at once that the social coup-d'état, like many a political one, proved a failure. Many weeks later, on returning from Egypt, we found H. C. in Lady Maria's blackest books. He had refused to propose to the great heiress because he considered her auburn hair distinctly red ; and the latter, in a fit of pique, had engaged herself to a ritualistic curate with a receding forehead, a lisp, an incipient moustache, the whitest of hands, but absolutely no brains. The house in Park Lane was shut up. Lady Maria had gone off for three weeks to Gastein, to take the baths and recruit her shattered nerves ; and H. C. was killing time at his Yorkshire shooting box. "It has been a blow to my aunt, but she is coming round," he wrote word as soon as he heard of our arrival. "I had a letter from her yesterday. She wants me to run over and fetch her, and I suppose I must do so by way of *amende honorable*. Gastein is not what it was, she declares. The mountains oppress her, and the noise of the waterfall drives her mad. As usual, she has the 'Bismarck rooms' at Straubinger's, and, as they literally overhang the roaring torrent, I have no doubt that she does find it a little too much for her nerves."

So that H. C., in attendance upon Lady Maria, had not accompanied us to Egypt. But the reader may remember H. as having gone down channel with us to Dartmouth, leaving his Kentish home for that purpose, where he had made himself conspicuous by climbing the greenhouses like a wild cat, and appropriating the finest bunches

of muscats of Alexandria by way of impromptu dessert, thereby turning the head gardener into a wild man with dangerous tendencies. "There is a certain fine fitness of things in the idea of my accompanying you to Alexandria itself," he had laughed, when we first talked the matter over. "Perhaps we shall find the muscats growing about the streets ; we may only have to stretch out our hands and pluck the bunches ; but they will never be half so good as those other grapes of Kent."

It was only the case over again that stolen pleasures are sweetest. For we are all apt to forget that the proverb is mere sophistry ; the most deceitful of all proverbs. Too often our stolen pleasures, like the apples of old, turn to ashes in the mouth, and like the waters of Meribah, grow bitter to the taste. This, however, does not refer to such boyish freaks as climbing greenhouses and thinning grape-vines. Since those climbing days some years of discretion had been added to H.'s shoulders, and a course of military discipline and training had not been without its usual effect.

So we had started one dark and bitterly cold night from Charing Cross, rejoicing in the hope that in less than thirty hours we should be revelling in the balmy breezes of the Mediterranean. The journey had taken its usual course. A crowded boat ; a cold crossing to Calais ; substantial fare and delicious hot coffee at the new buffet, which put fresh life into us, and made us feel, like Alexander, anxious for other worlds to conquer ; a few polite words to the powers that were resulting in a compartment to ourselves for the rest of the long journey.

Night had given place to a grey dawn when we made the interminable circuit of Paris. After this all the well-known spots succeeded each other ; Lyons with its broad rivers flowing side by side ; Avignon, that fortress of the middle ages, where the great Palace of the Popes and the Cathedral of Notre Dame des Doms overshadow the waters of the Rhone ; Nimes with its Roman, and Arles with its Greek influences and immense amphitheatre, once given over to scenes that happily have passed away, though still devoted to the Bull-fight. The first stage of our journey was over when we rattled through the streets of Marseilles.

Instead of the balmy air we hoped for, a miserable mistral was blowing, which promised badly for the commencement of our voyage *per mare*. They had lighted large wood fires in our rooms, and a strong smell of charcoal burning and a feeling of asphyxia met us on the very threshold. The offending elements were soon withdrawn. The huge salle-à-manger was half lighted for the benefit of benighted travellers, most of whom were on their way to Algiers by Saturday's boat. There they hoped to escape from the universal winter, but, as it fell out, only plunged into deeper depths of snow and ice. A small buzz of conversation was going on, and timid travellers of both sexes were exchanging opinions as to what the sea would prove on

the morrow. One feeble-looking gentleman was holding forth at a small table to a formidable-looking lady, whose upper lip was adorned with a moustache, seated at the next small table.

"I candidly confess," he said, "that I am going to Algiers to avoid the temptations of Monte Carlo. I have generally wintered there, but I have a mania for gambling; I cannot resist it; and having lost half my fortune at Rouge et Noir, I am trying to keep the other half by avoiding the danger."

"Sir," replied the lady in a masculine and very awful voice, "I fear you are a dissipated character, whilst I am a virtuous female, belonging to the very strictest sect of Plymouth Brethren."

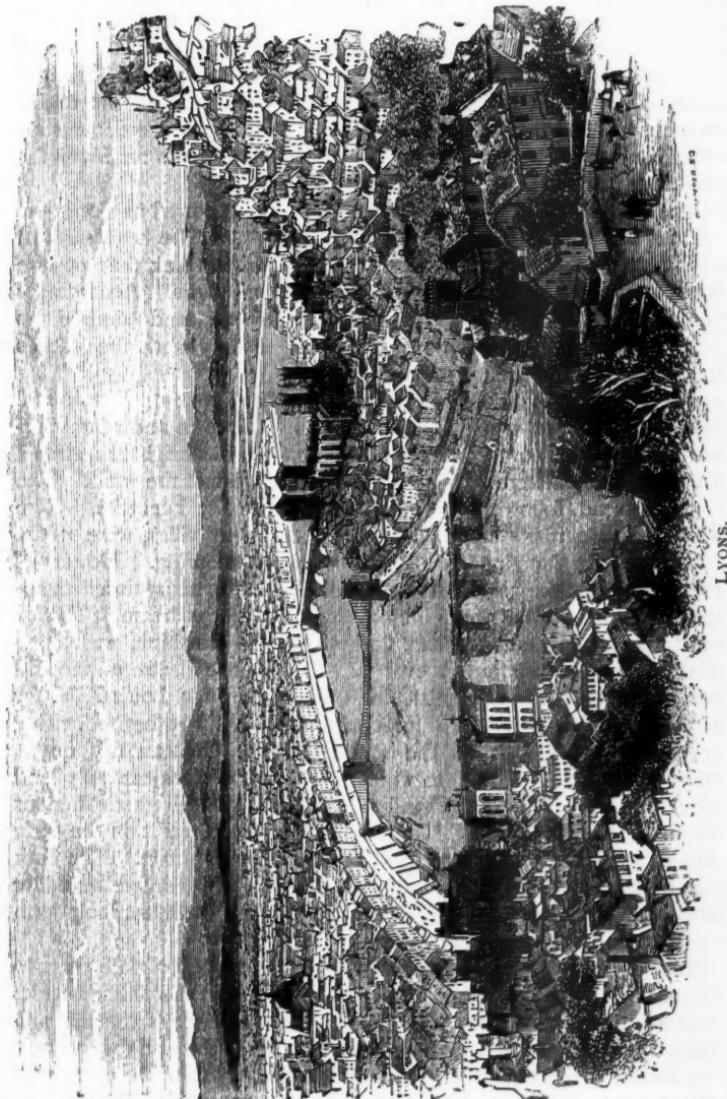
"Plymouth Brethren," responded the feeble gentleman, with a very pointed look at the lady's upper lip. "Is that the reason that you wear—but what am I talking about? I beg your pardon. How can you be a Plymouth Brother? Should it not be Plymouth Sister?"

The lady was drinking some hot tea at the moment, and a little of it went the wrong way, and before she could recover her breath, a fresh arrival of late travellers, and a great scraping of chairs and settling into seats (they were noisy Americans) put an end to this small passage at arms. We have often wondered since, whether Algiers turned them into great friends or confirmed enemies.

The morrow brought sunshine with it, if not a very smooth sea. We went down early to the quays and inspected the *Sénégal*, belonging to the Messageries Maritimes, a favourite Service until present experiences very much modified our views on the subject. The berths taken in London were not given to us, and the polite clerk at the office regretted that they had been previously given away in Marseilles. In this matter we fared sufficiently well; one cabin was very much the same as another; but the Commissariat department left much to be desired. The best boats of the Company are those that take the longer voyages: "les bateaux à long cours," as one of the officers expressed it to us: those that merely coast between Marseilles and Jaffa are inferior in all respects. Still, upon the principle of being thankful for small mercies, we had nothing very much to complain of: and compared with the horrors and discomfort of the Austrian Lloyd boat, by which we were forced to return—for reasons to be hereafter given—we were in absolute Paradise.

When we went down to inspect the *Sénégal* that first morning, she was lying off shore in the Bassin de la Joliette. Within the immense shed, running the whole length of the quay, a wily old Marseillais was selling deck chairs. We bought two from him, which he branded with our initials, and we should have fared badly without them. Just as in the old days, it was the fashion for people going out to tea to take their own cup and saucer: and occasionally the custom though not the fashion in leaving—like old Lady C.—to pocket a few of the spoons with their own cup and saucer: so in travelling by sea, it is necessary in these days to take your own deck chair if you

wish for any comfort at all during the voyage. And in spite of letters branded, and cards plainly addressed and attached, your chair will be



LYONS.

appropriated by those who have not been provident enough to bring their own, and have no respect for the laws of meum and tuum.

We were constantly troubled in this way. A passenger, indeed,

one day took possession of one of the chairs and refused to give it up when the steward went to him with a polite intimation that he was trespassing on other people's property. He declared that possession was nine points of the law, and he was much too comfortable to disturb himself. The only excuse we could make for him was that he was a German. At last the bright idea occurred to H. of sticking small pins into the cane seats of the chairs whenever we were not occupying them. If rather a severe it was an effective remedy. At the end of three days our chairs remained for ever after perfectly unmolested.

The *Sénégal* was in the bassin, and a boatman rowed us alongside. We had little beyond our trouble for our pains. The head steward was in all the freedom of undress, and seemed to think that no one ought to wish to know anything at that stage of affairs. Accordingly he knew nothing; was as silent as an oracle, and assured us that everything would be known and arranged only when the officials arrived from the office.

We returned to shore no wiser than we had gone on board, and consoled ourselves with a long drive round the town and neighbourhood. It was all new ground to H. Marseilles was bright and sunny, warm in the sheltered by-ways, cold where we met the wind. The Corniche road, following the coast, was especially beautiful. The walls of the gardens upon the slopes, enclosing villas, were richly decorated with hanging creepers of gorgeous colouring. Flowers of every hue met the gaze. Already we felt in the many-tinted atmosphere of the South, where life passes in a rainbow dream. To our right the blue Mediterranean, flashing in the sunshine, was beautiful as the Mediterranean ever is. Out in the centre of the old harbour rose Fort St. Nicholas, built by Vauban for Louis XIV. for a "bastide"—a local term for country-house. Yet beyond, rising grim and stately out of the water, lies the Château d'If on its small island, so exposed to wind and sea that boats can only land here in calm weather. Alexandre Dumas made the castle famous by his wonderful story of Monte Cristo: a keep, built in the early part of the sixteenth century, and used as a State prison. The dark and gloomy dungeons are shown to the visitor, who may well shudder as he thinks of the many lives that have taken their last look upon the world on entering these portals of despair.

Like many another place, Marseilles has increased of late years to proportions little dreamed of in the days when steam was unknown. Its streets rival those of Paris; the Cannebière is a scene of constant animation; its basins and harbours are five times the size they were in the middle of this century; six million tons of shipping every year pass through its waters, two-thirds being the result of importation; it is great in commerce and in manufactures, soap being a chief article of production.

It owes much to its magnificent situation, both as a commer-

cial and a pleasure town. Its merchants are proverbially wealthy, but not very great in cultivating refinement and the fine arts. They have built themselves magnificent villas on the surrounding heights, and pass their lives in alternations of work and luxurious ease. Unable to boast of long pedigrees, they affect to lightly esteem the *ancienne noblesse* of France. In Paris the Faubourg St. Germain is the one with which they are least familiar. And yet—the world is changing : has changed. This state of things existed some years ago ; it scarcely exists to-day. Now wealth rules the world, and is the open sesame to the most exclusive circles. We have just heard, indeed, that Lady Maria, the most autocratic and aristocratic of women, proposed to admit Miss de Courcy Flushington into the bosom of her family, and had a serious attack of the nerves when her scheme fell through. Miss Flushington's father had begun life as an ordinary workman in the silver mines of Peru, and subsequently had made his daughter's dowry of two millions entirely out of oil. Not that this in the least reflected upon Miss de Courcy Flushington. She was pretty and accomplished, and if her ways and tones were a little American, that was only to be expected ; and according to some, to whom any sort of variety is charming, added to her piquancy. Nine people out of ten would have said that H. C. was a very foolish fellow.

The merchants of Marseilles, then, are very rich, if not very refined ; and, to do them justice, they really trouble themselves as little about the *ancienne noblesse* as they do about the Parisian accent. Their own accent is abominable, and French loses much of its wonderful charm when spoken by a Marseillais. Their villas are palatial, and from the heights they may survey the whole of their flourishing city—all the extent of their quays and harbours ; they may watch the shimmering blue waters of the Levant blending with the sky in the far distance, and may almost be pardoned for thinking and saying that their little corner of the world is earth's paradise. It is only a question of comparison and degree, a matter of opinion, after all. We love what we are most familiar with. The Esquimaux is content to envy no man, and the Red Indian would not change places with the Mikado of Japan. In point of fact, the immediate neighbourhood of Marseilles is not very interesting, unless you look seawards.

But if the Marsellais of to-day is a *nouveau riche*, his town possesses the merit of antiquity. It was the Massilia of the ancient Greeks, a colony said to have been founded by the Phœceans of Asia Minor, driven into exile by Cyrus, King of Persia, six hundred years before the Christian era. They rapidly rose in power, defeated the Carthaginians near Corsica, and three hundred years after their foundation allied themselves to the Romans. But Rome also grew in power and ambition, marched forth with her imperial armies, and Massilia was subdued and conquered by Julius Cæsar.

The town in those days was given up to heathen worship, and a temple of Diana stood where now stands the imposing but unfinished cathedral. On the shore there stood a temple dedicated to Neptune and another to Apollo. There was a great deal of the classic Greek in the atmosphere, and many youths completed their education at Massilia, just as others did at Athens. It is said to have been Christianised by St. Victor in the third century, who was martyred here in the year 287; but another legend declares that it was first introduced by St. Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Our Lord raised from the dead. Later on Massilia was destroyed by the Saracens, was subsequently restored, and became subject to the Vicomtes de Marseille, from whom it took its name.

By many writers the Phœcean account is considered legendary, and it is more generally supposed that Massilia was founded by the Phœnicians, about 900 or 1000 B.C. Inscriptions and bas-reliefs discovered in a street of Marseilles in 1863 seem to point to this theory.

Aristotle composed a treatise on the Massilian Republic, of which only a fragment remains. The wisdom and learning of its institutions have been recorded by Herodotus, Plutarch, Polybius, Justin, Thucydides, Strabo, Cicero and other writers of that time. The Massilian morals were so severe and unflinching that Plautus holds them up as a type of perfection.

After allying themselves to the Romans and forming themselves into a republic, they strengthened their navy and built them large dockyards. Several naval engagements were sustained against the Carthaginians. The Ligurians coming down upon them unsuccessfully, they strongly fortified their city. The subsequent downfall of Carthage and the victories of Marius (Marius has remained to this day the favourite Christian name of the youth of Marseilles) brought Massilia to the height of prosperity. Then came reverses. Having helped the Romans to destroy Carthage and conquer Liguria, she had to submit in turn to the yoke of bondage. Taking part with Pompey, she was attacked by Cæsar, who, at that time in Spain, sent forth his armies in command of Trebonius and Brutus. Surprised in the midst of a luxurious effeminacy, the effect of too much of prosperity (such as afterwards proved fatal to Rome herself), Massilia rose up and made a long and splendid resistance. The destruction of her navy, though it brought her almost to despair, only caused her to redouble her efforts. An epidemic within the walls, which decimated the inhabitants, finally caused her to give up the struggle, and when Cæsar himself arrived from Spain, she opened her gates and surrendered to him. Mindful of her past greatness, he left her her laws and her liberty, but destroyed her implements of war, her fortifications, seized her vessels, her treasures, her neighbouring colonies, and occupied her citadels with his own troops.

In the Middle Ages, Marseilles consisted of three distinct towns,

THE ORANGE BOATS, MARSEILLES.



each possessing its separate governor, territories and port. At the time of the Crusades she had again become as free, independent and flourishing, as before the Roman Conquest. Everything prospered with her. Once more her ports were crowded with shipping, her commerce spread, and she became as wealthy as in the days which had succeeded the conquest of Tyre and Carthage.

This brought down upon her the envy and ambition of other nations, and in 1253 she was forced to yield to Charles I. of Anjou, who promised to maintain all the rights and liberties of the town. But Marseilles, trying to shake off the yoke by declaring her independence and allying herself to Alphonso X., King of Castille, Charles of Anjou marched upon the town, reduced it by famine, beheaded the chief promoters of the revolt, and took possession of the citadel.

In 1481 it was united to France, with a reservation of many privileges, and took a prominent part against Henri IV. in the wars of the Ligue. In 1524 the Constable of Bourbon besieged Marseilles with an army 40,000 strong. After a valiant defence of forty days and nights, they were about to surrender when the women of the town rose in a body and rallied their courage. In three days these women had laid a countermine which under ordinary circumstances would have taken a fortnight to construct, and the town was saved. In their memory one of the boulevards is still called the *Boulevard des Dames*.

Marseilles took an active part in the religious wars of the 16th century. She refused to recognise Henri IV., who succeeded in entering the town through treachery. Then on the 2nd March, 1660, Louis XIV. entered the town by a breach in the ramparts. Marseilles again became united to France, and was rejoicing in the happiness of peaceful days, when on the 25th May, 1720, the Plague broke out, brought to it by *Le grand St. Antoine*, a vessel laden with wool. The saint was not kindly disposed. It proved one of the worst devastations that ever laid low a town, and claimed 50,000 victims. The Bishop of Marseilles celebrated mass with bare feet and a halter round his neck, offering himself as an expiatory sacrifice to the Divine wrath.

In later times her hatred of Napoleon I. was profound. She accused him of the ruin of her commerce and the misery of her working population. When he landed at Cannes she organized an expedition to eject him, but Napoleon allowed them no time for operations. The result of Waterloo caused her the wildest joy and rejoicing. The tricoloured flag was trampled under foot ; the people wished to disarm the garrison commanded by Verdier ; but at the cry of "Vive le roi !" the soldiers responded by singing the Marseillaise. When Verdier prudently retired to Toulon, the Royalists, left in possession of the town, launched into the wildest excesses. A colony of Mamelukes, who had followed in the train of Napoleon



STROMBOLI.

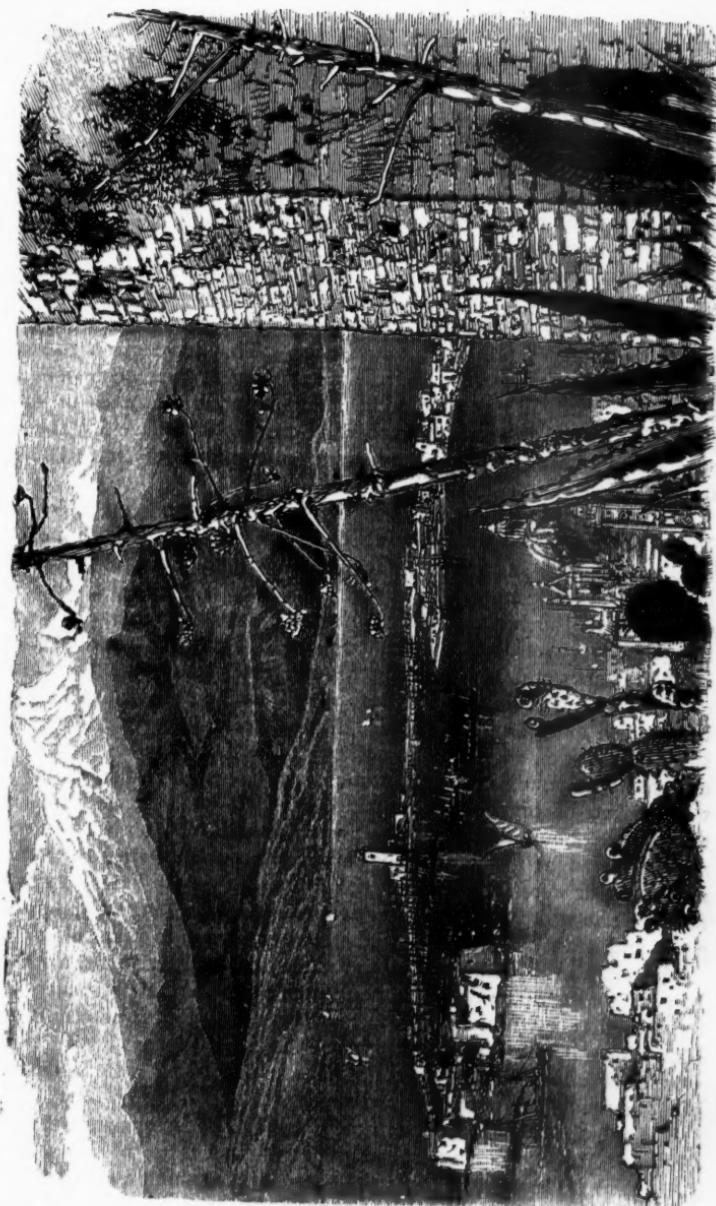
from Egypt, were massacred, together with every one in the least suspected of Imperialism. Then followed pillage and destruction ; until the merchants of the town, alarmed at so much lawlessness, marched against the insurgents, and order was restored.

Louis XIV. withdrew from Marseilles all her privileges and since that time she has possessed only the distinction of a seaport and commercial town. But at all times Marseilles has taken foremost rank in the annals of her country. The Marseillais, whatever his fault, has almost always been noted for perseverance and determination, and so, to-day, Marseilles bears away the palm for prosperity. It has been very much of a royal and a loyal town, and suffered much in the great revolution. Now it is strongly republican. In 1792, by an unhappy error, it sent an immense number of galley slaves to Paris, who conducted themselves more like fiends than human beings. It was for these that Rougon de l'Isle, an Alsatian officer of Engineers, composed the famous Marseillaise hymn, "Allons, Enfants de la Patrie !" which has ever since remained the Republican National air of France.

The reign of Louis Philippe had been a very prosperous one for Marseilles ; no wonder that she was a staunch Royalist ; but her most remarkable era was from 1850 to 1870. No town in Europe ever made such strides in so short a time. She has become the first maritime, the first commercial city in France ; her trade has assumed gigantic proportions ; she is necessary to all nations ; and her wealth, as in the days of Carthage, has once more become unbounded.

Thus, in spite of its busy scenes, its commercial aspect, its ports and warehouses crowded with shipping and merchandise, we felt on classic ground. It was a little difficult to realise whilst passing through these wide, modern thoroughfares, that Greece and Rome had once held sway here ; that Tyre and Carthage had contributed to the prosperity of ancient Marseilles—and to her downfall ; that on the site of that unfinished cathedral a temple dedicated to the worship of Diana once stood, and another to Apollo on the shores where the blue waters of the tideless sea were for ever surging. All around us were the slopes on which the town is built, bound by an encircling chain of hills, rich in orange groves, oliveyards and vineyards.

Our driver, tired of the Corniche road, whose charms were too well-known to be appreciated by him, presently turned into the long and magnificent Prado, a continuation of the Rue de Rome, lined with trees on both sides, and forming the favourite and fashionable promenade of the people of Marseilles. From this we passed into the old town ; old without being picturesque. The streets were narrow and not too clean, the people matched their surroundings. A steep ascent brought us to the famous rocky hill, with its Votive Chapel, Notre Dame de la Garde. The once small building has been enlarged into an important Romanesque church with a lofty bell



MESSINA.

tower, built in 1864. This tower is crowned by a statue of the Virgin, gilded and in bad taste. Of the original chapel built in 1214 very little remains. The present Byzantine church was erected entirely by voluntary contributions. It is richly decorated with costly white marbles from Carrara, red marbles from Africa, green marbles from the Alps. The walls are covered with votive offerings, many of them frightful caricatures of scenes through which their donors have passed. Ostrich eggs, silver and other models of vessels, rope-ends that have saved men from drowning, are religiously suspended from the ceiling. The original image of the Virgin in olive wood, and very ancient, is kept below in the crypt. Throughout the neighbourhood and far down the shores of the Mediterranean, the church and the image are the objects of the utmost reverence. They have given rise to many a pilgrimage; many a miracle is supposed to have been worked here; and many a pair of crutches, hanging upon the walls or suspended from the roof, was discarded by cripples who have felt themselves cured whilst invoking the merciful intervention of Notre Dame de la Garde.

From these heights the view is wide-spread and magnificent. Marseilles lies below us, covering the slopes with its multitude of houses. On the surrounding hills are innumerable country places, resorts of the rich merchants in summer. Encircling all is the chain of hills with thin weird-looking olive-yards, luscious vineyards, fragrant orange groves. Far down one has a complete view of the splendid docks and basins; the acres and acres of quays; the ports crowded with shipping, where flags of all nations are flying in the breeze and enlivening the scene. At one point one notices a great stir and bustle, a great commotion and animation; the quay is crowded with young men and women hurrying up and down a gangway, baskets of oranges upon their heads. If we were only nearer to them we should hear that their work was carried on with much shout and laughter, much badinage, a gay insouciance; as if the day and the hour were sufficient for them, and life was all happiness and roses. The white-winged boats stretch down in a long row, full of grace and beauty. It is one of the liveliest scenes in Marseilles.

Beyond all this, rising out of the water like twin creations, are the Isle d'If and the Isle St. Jean, the latter once in the possession of the Knights of Malta; the former with its castle, where once Mirabeau was imprisoned, and where Monte Cristo went through his wonderful adventures. Afar off lie the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean, full of beauty and repose.

Yet one very soon has enough of Marseilles under our present conditions. An approaching embarkation; a wonder as to how it will all be: what the passage, what the people: everything contributes to make one somewhat restless and unsettled. A sea voyage in prospective seems full of charm: when the moment arrives the charm vanishes as mist before the sun: it may return with more or less

reality, but never reaches the first "glow of early thought." No doubt there is nothing like a sea voyage for health ; but pleasure is another matter.

So we were glad when, that Saturday afternoon, the hour struck for departure. Down we went to the Quai de la Joliette, where the good ship *Sénégal*, now alongside, was getting up steam. The head-steward, now magnificent in silver lace and white gloves, had put on his royal manner, and received us as if we had been ambassadors. The gentlemen from the office were in the saloon, arranging the cabins. Everything was satisfactorily settled as far as we were concerned ; one berth, one cabin, seemed very much like another, for they were all more or less amidships. It was also a pleasure to find that we were not to be overcrowded with passengers and that there were no small children amongst them.

The last moment is generally a scene of hurrying and confusion. There are always passengers for shore who are behind time ; bells may ring for ever, they never move until the vessel itself is under weigh. Last goodbyes are lingering. Some of the last to walk down the steep gangway were two women in the picturesque dress of nuns, who had escorted to her cabin a third and evidently very dear sister. The farewell apparently was for ever, for they waited long, and left with eyes red from weeping. The sister never appeared during the voyage. After the nuns came the office officials, by no means in the same state of depression. The last bell rang, ropes were withdrawn, and we were under steam. We made way slowly but surely. Gradually Marseilles with all its shipping passed from view ; the houses upon the slopes disappeared, the encircling hills grew faint and shadowy. Notre Dame on the heights was the last to fade away, whilst the gilded image crowning the bell tower, seemed to upraise its arms in the act of benediction.

We were soon well out upon the blue waters. The group of islands was passed, the sea in all its beauty lay stretched before us. We should not again touch land until we reached Alexandria. Night soon fell upon that first day, shutting out everything excepting a great waste of black waters and an apparently illimitable, star-gemmed sky.

From the very beginning the Mediterranean showed us that she did not intend to behave amiably. From first to last the sea was choppy and the air was cold. We had never known her in this unkindly mood ; always she had been as a sea of glass, the air warm and sparkling ; this was a new and not very agreeable experience. A thoroughly good storm at sea is worth encountering, but a cold wind for ever blowing and a choppy sea that never stays its disagreeable motion, these are discomforts one could well do without.

Day after day passed with little change. Some of our passengers proved very agreeable and did much to lighten the monotony of the journey. Particularly so were an English General officer and a French Count. Both were great travellers, had seen much of the world.

The latter was especially enterprising ; was a member of the true ancienne noblesse ; a keen lover of sport ; a great horseman, possessing many of those manly attributes that are less prevalent with the French than with us. His anecdotes and adventures were endless, and hour after hour passed pleasantly and quickly in his society. When the day came for our lines to separate—as separate they did at Cairo, when he went up the Nile, and we did not—it was with sincere regret on our part.

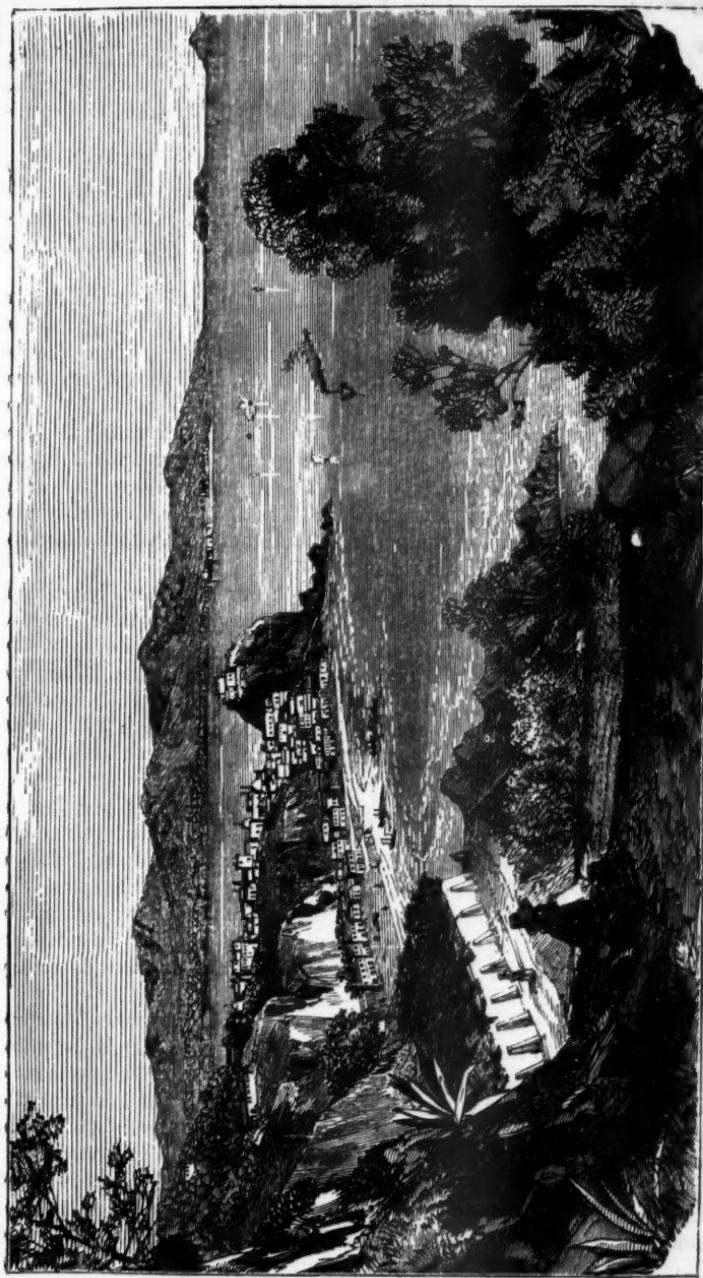
On the journey down the Mediterranean, very little of the coast was seen. We almost sighted our dear old Majorca, but not quite ; she was too far behind us. In due time we steamed through the Straits of Bonifacio, and saw Corsica on one side of us, Sardinia on the other. The former looked green and bright; an oasis in a desert of water ; the latter seemed wild and barren. Both possess their charms, and are worth visiting at the right season of the year.

Sardinia has not made very great progress in the way of civilisation. Few people visit the island, with its numerous chains of mountains ; its immense plain, once so fertile ; its thousands of prehistoric monuments, so peculiar to itself ; its red deer and its partridges, affording such good sport ; its innumerable small streams, that help to feed the four larger streams flowing to the sea. Here may be found all the vegetation of North Africa ; certain parts of its shores are lined with palm-trees that grow in clumps and groups, and stand out boldly against the clear sky. Its olive trees are the largest known specimens. There is much to repay a visit ; not least attraction of all that it is not overrun by the modern tourist. The forests, once so dense, are fast disappearing. They have been given up to the charcoal-burner, and however picturesque he may be in his work, it is a work of destruction, for ever going on. The day of sorrow will come to the people. Sardinia, once the granary of Rome, is becoming less and less fertile ; and when her forests have disappeared and with them much of her rainfall, there will be little work left for the sickle.

Corsica, the sister and much smaller island, is better known and more frequented. The charming climate of Ajaccio attracts many in the early spring of the year. It is rich in vegetation and in many natural beauties. Its green hills and its wild ravines are matchless. Its people are interesting studies, but woe be unto those who fall under the Vendetta. Their hate is deadly, and vengeance to them is more than life.

Time passed on, and Sicily's lovely shores opened up. Round that point and promontory we pictured Palermo as we had last seen it, a veritable day-dream, an earthly paradise possessing few rivals. Once more, we saw Etna sending forth her volume of smoke, towering into the heavens and overshadowing Catania. Messina, the most important but least interesting spot in all Sicily, slept in

BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.



the sunshine ; and we longed once more to be treading the classic and deeply interesting ground of Syracuse, with its graceful pools, where grow the lilies and the reeds, and the papyrus raises its beautiful head.

On our other hand rose the curious Lipari Islands, with their sharp peaks and wild and barren conformations, looking as if they were the result of some wild upheaval of nature, some great volcanic disturbance. Stromboli was sending forth its smoke in great volumes, a miniature Etna.

Then came the Straits of Messina, and we passed between Scylla and Charybdis. Reggio, at the extreme south of Italy, looked wonderfully picturesque, backed by the mountains of the Aspromonte, a spot made sacred by the visit of St. Paul on his way from Cæsarea to Rome. The keen wind that blew took much from our pleasure as we passed through all this wonderfully interesting portion of the Levant. Every one was glad of great coats and ulsters ; the ladies were muffled in furs. Was it possible that we were hastening to a land where winter was unknown ? The shores both of Italy and Sicily looked very unlike the perpetual summer with which imagination endows these romantic regions.

Once through the Straits, we felt that our vessel really pointed towards Alexandria. There was only a steady course to pursue. Certainly the air grew warmer as we neared Egypt. Wednesday, the last day dawned, the last night fell. By daylight on Thursday morning the long low shores of Egypt were visible. In front of us was Alexandria, the lighthouse on Ras-el-Jeen, Pompey's Pillar, and the Ramleh Palace standing out conspicuously. Before six o'clock we had come to an anchor.

On first approaching Alexandria, the aspect of the place is anything but striking and romantic. The earliest view of this most ancient of countries—this land of the lotus and the Sacred Ibis—is certainly not impressive. Your ideas of Eastern magnificence—the glory with which you have invested this city founded by Alexander the Great—your hope of Arabian pomp and Arabian magic—so closely allied to the Egyptian—all this for the moment is rudely dispersed.

Nowhere can you see anything gorgeous and picturesque. Mosques and minarets do not rear their stately heads. Cleopatra's Needles, once so conspicuous, no longer exist here. One graces the unromantic banks of the Thames ; the other, presented by Ismail Pacha to the Americans, reposes in New York amidst modern and very unclassical surroundings, proving once more how much extremes may meet.

During six long days in crossing the Mediterranean you have indulged in Eastern visions ; your imagination has raised palaces and temples such as the ancients delighted in—the ancients, who loved everything that was gigantic, gorgeous, magnificent and dignified ; you have revelled once more in all the stories of the Arabian

Nights, filling your mind with a rich imagery that no earthly power could ever produce—for what reality ever came up to our dreams? You have longed for a first sight of these wonders of the land of Egypt, sacred to the memory of corn and wine, of all that is classical, historical and religious. And in the early morning your first glance rests upon the pale sand ; upon long, low, flat reaches ; so low and flat that twenty miles away they cannot be seen. They are white and barren ; you look in vain even for the palm tree to break the monotony of the level, and stand out as an object of delicate grace and beauty against the flushing sky of sunrise. There only do you find gorgeousness and magnificence, but the hand of man has no part in it. You have watched the darkness slowly creep away ; a light break in the east, pale and faint, but every moment increasing, until crimson flames flash about the sky and an orange glow paints the east, and at last the sun shoots above the horizon. Here, indeed, you have gorgeousness and magnificence enough, increased a thousandfold by the wonderful air, more bright and dry and crisp than any you ever breathed before.

Thus, as we came alongside, there was an Eastern glow over everything that was very dazzling, but it was the effect of light and atmosphere, not of "gorgeous palaces and cloud-capp'd towers."

The quay was crowded with a throng of natives, of different sects and nations. They looked picturesque in their various dresses and decidedly gained enchantment by distance. A perfect Babel of conversation was going on amongst them, and they pushed and hustled each other without ceremony. If they had been going in for sedition and mutiny they could hardly have made greater uproar or looked more fierce and glaring. The very moment we were alongside they swarmed into the lower decks and a most bewildering pandemonium commenced. Every passenger was surrounded by a crowd of swarthy, dark-faced Egyptians, each one of whom seemed ready to produce an invisible dagger if you did not employ him. One dark man, taller and stronger than most of them, bore upon his cap the words Hôtel Khedivial. Him we seized upon, and he soon cleared a passage for us. The stewards at this moment were of very little use ; they were running to and fro as men demented, and rather added to the confusion. Willing and obliging they had been throughout the passage, but here their reign and their usefulness seemed to come to an end.

Our tall guide took up our baggage as if it had been a mere feather's weight and, hurling what seemed the most tremendous anathemas right and left of him, cleared us a way through the throng and put us into one of the multitude of open flys waiting on the quay.

Then came the Custom-house, where, however, nothing was looked at and we were hardly called upon to leave our seats. They are far more particular with travellers leaving the country than

with those entering. Duty is exacted upon every article of Egyptian make that you may take away with you : apparently a short-sighted policy.

At our entrance we met the nicest and most straightforward official that we found in Egypt. He was standing at the Custom-house door in his green uniform, paper and pencil in hand. He it was who passed us without giving us the trouble of opening anything. Backsheesh we knew to be the law of the land, a recognised and admitted institution. His civility was so marked, his manner so frank and gracious, that we felt it as a welcome to Egypt. We were really anxious to make some return, and delicately produced a substantial coin. For the first and only time in Egypt our backsheesh was refused—yet so universal is the custom that it created no painful feeling and was declined with a frank and winning smile. Never again did we meet with so much honesty. Backsheesh is the password of the people. It is said to be the first word they hear on entering the world, the last they utter on leaving it. Even the smallest children, when they can scarcely run and before they can speak, will follow your carriage and cry "Sheesh! Sheesh!" having as yet only mastered one syllable of this Open Sesame. Perhaps they have more excuse than some other countries, who indulge in it almost as freely. Egypt is very poor, and, in too many cases, with travellers whose hearts go before their reason, they have only to ask and to receive.

Finally we found ourselves clear of the throng and the Babel, the quay and the Custom-house, dashing through the streets of Alexandria, our guide like a small Pompey's pillar towering beside the driver.

Of Eastern influence and magnificence we saw nothing. Alexandria has of late years risen immensely in prosperity and wealth ; but it is entirely due to commercial success, and she is absolutely a commercial city. Her streets and squares are new, many of them dating from the bombardment of 1881, when damage to the extent of nearly five million pounds had to be paid as indemnity by the Egyptian government. Many of the new buildings are palatial and such as you would find in the very finest parts of Paris or London. Alexandria, indeed, might be likened in many ways to a small Paris, with her cafés, her boulevards and her shops, and the trees that line some of the thoroughfares. It is on the outskirts of the town that you come upon the Eastern influence and atmosphere, and these, the most interesting parts, we did not pass on our road to the hotel.

We were in no way disappointed ; we knew Alexandria to be modern in aspect as she is in prosperity, and we were content to wait for our Oriental impressions. Our guide on the box, with his dark face and flashing eyes, his turban and his Eastern dress, was a picturesque object enough, and an earnest of greater things to come.

THE EVENT AT MILFORD.

THE Manor had found a tenant at last; so much was certain. The news awoke great interest, and gave rise to numerous conjectures among the good people of Milford. The house had been empty for a year or more; a handsome house, substantial in the main, but falling a little out of repair, and looking somewhat desolate as it stood, with closed shutters, in the midst of its neglected grounds. As yet nothing was known of the new-comer beyond his name—the well-sounding name of Meredith. It might fairly be assumed that he possessed considerable means, since carpenters and masons had been set at work immediately, refitting the residence against his arrival. Milford, a little inland town, languishing for excitement, congratulated itself on the prospect of so desirable an acquisition.

"How pretty those French windows are, opening on the lawn," observed Kitty Gray. "I wonder what sort of people they are?"

"That is what nobody can tell you," replied her sister, Miss Lavinia. "Respectable people, I hope."

"Oh, of course. But are they young or old, and are there any girls among them——"

"Or any young men?" suggested Miss Lavinia.

"Well—yes. Where's the harm? I am sure a nice young man would be a treasure here. We have only half-a-dozen among twice as many girls. And I wonder if they will be friendly and social, or keep to themselves? If they are only good neighbours it will be so pleasant. There are no such rooms for dancing anywhere."

"True. But Colonel Meredith and his wife are very probably a steady old couple, who will go nowhere but to church, and would be horrified at the very mention of a dance. I advise you to moderate your expectations."

Though Miss Lavinia gave such sober counsel she was not herself entirely wanting in curiosity. She thought, though she never hinted such a thing, that there was possibly no Mrs. Meredith in the case. The colonel of that name might be a well-to-do bachelor, or a widower not inconsolable. The possibility was interesting. Miss Lavinia, though considered by her sister Kitty and all that set as a confirmed old maid, though she was only twenty-seven, did by no means regard herself as hopelessly fixed in that estate. Indeed, it was hard to say why she had not long ago exchanged it for prosperous matrimony. A neat little figure, a soft blue eye, a complexion still delicately pink and white, rendered her appearance very pleasing; her temper was admirable, her domestic attainments of

the highest order. She pondered in her own mind the fatuity of men, and was amazed thereat.

A few days later a travelling-carriage, laden with trunks, was seen to drive in at the great gate of the Meredith place. Expectation was on tiptoe. Everybody went to church on Sunday morning, and dozens of bright eyes were on the look-out for the entrance of the strangers.

Miss Lavinia was disappointed: including Kitty. No pretty girls appeared, and no elaborate youths. Colonel Meredith was a gentlemanly person of middle age; the handsome, fashionably-dressed woman, some years younger, was evidently his wife.

The pair were soon pronounced an acquisition to the neighbourhood. Miss Lavinia was rather dilatory about calling. She could not help feeling a slight coolness towards the Mrs. Meredith so superfluously present, and was in no haste to make her acquaintance. But report spoke so highly of the taste with which the house was fitted up, and of the agreeable manners of the inmates, that she overcame her prejudice. She was rewarded by finding Mrs. Meredith the most delightful of women, ready to be charmed with her new home, and full of plans for enlivening it. Even Kitty, who was apt to regard anyone at twenty-five as nearing the regions of decrepitude, relented toward Mrs. Meredith, who must have passed five years beyond that limit. The lady's dress, her air, the arrangements of her dwelling, speedily became the standard of admiring contemporaries. She made the place gay with dinner-parties and evening gatherings; she encouraged picnics and boating; she gave the young people frequent opportunities of dancing in the spacious rooms Kitty had commended. Her own dancing, when now and then she was prevailed upon to join a set, was exquisite; the girls tried in vain to imitate its unconscious grace. She sang, too, the newest music, in a voice of velvet and honey. Never, in short, did a woman so brilliant, gracious and accomplished, dawn on a delighted little country-town, and her popularity corresponded to the measure of her charms.

The Colonel, meanwhile, was somewhat in the shade. His manners were gravely polite, and he interested himself more in the culture of land than in social gaieties. He was considered a quiet person, a perfect gentleman, and most especially fortunate in possessing such a wife!

It was a pleasant summer in Milford; for none more so than for Miss Lavinia. Mrs. Meredith had taken to her from the very first, and they were soon on terms of intimacy. It was flattering to be sought by the great lady of the neighbourhood; one, too, whose society was in itself a pleasure. And as time went on, Miss Lavinia had another source of interest. Mr. Elwood, who had so long held bachelor sway over the broad acres of Elwood Grange, betrayed symptoms of a disposition to admit a partner of his rule. He escorted Miss Lavinia home from one festive gathering, he talked

with her for full ten minutes at another. He called at the house to see her father, and brought with him, casually, a basket of flowers and fruit for Miss Lavinia. Kitty rallied her sister on these indications, and the raillery was received with pleasure. Similar demonstrations from the same quarter had been regarded coolly seven or eight years before, but time is a powerful educator, and alters our views of many things.

"My dear," said Mrs. Meredith one morning, with a twinkle of amusement in her bright brown eyes, "what does all this nonsense of Kitty's mean? What has Mr. Elwood been about?"

"Kitty is so giddy," replied Miss Lavinia, blushing slightly. "He has shown me a little ordinary civility, that is all."

"Of course it is all," nodded her friend. "Don't let it go farther. I have set my heart on something quite different for you. The Colonel's brother is coming next week; a most delightful man. A year or two older than the Colonel, but you would never think it. I am no match-maker, I would scorn to be one. I only say, wait till you have seen my brother before you decide in Mr. Elwood's favour."

"Dear me," said Miss Lavinia, putting in a modest disclaimer, "what difference could it possibly make?"

"I know my brother's tastes pretty well," her friend affirmed, "and I can guess something of yours. Mr. Elwood is a worthy man—highly respectable—but I flatter myself that my brother — Well, we shall see what we shall see."

"Oh, you are too partial," said Miss Lavinia.

"To you or to Evan?"

"To me, of course. I don't doubt that Mr. Meredith deserves all you can say of him; I am sure he must, if he is at all like the Colonel. So his name is Evan—Evan Meredith. What a pretty name."

"And a good one, too, though I say it. The Merediths belong to the Welsh aristocracy."

"Welsh?" queried Miss Lavinia. Her knowledge of that nation was not extended, and had not prepared her to regard it in a patrician light.

"Certainly. Don't you know that the families of Wales are to all other ancient families as—as an oak to a shrub, or the stars to a lamp! The head of the Merediths lives in a castle among the Welsh mountains. It's rather interesting. An old family and a great castle, and troops of retainers—don't you think so?" Perhaps an observer might have detected a little malice in the smile with which the handsome, elegant woman regarded her unconscious companion as she spoke.

"Indeed I do. And Mr. Meredith is coming next week, you say?"

"Yes. He will be here for our show, I hope."

"Dear Mrs. Meredith, he will despise such little country doings."

"Despise them! Not he. He takes an interest in everything connected with agriculture. He is a great landowner himself, you know. And now I want you to advise me about what I shall wear on the day. Is this pale silk——"

The two ladies were presently deep in consultation, which Miss Lavinia found so interesting that she stayed beyond her time. During her hurried walk home she had leisure, nevertheless, to consider the odd turns of fortune here below. At no very distant period her only prospect was that of remaining a maiden in her father's house—and now what a vista opened before her. Poor Mr. Elwood! Her heart inclined to him, she thought kindly of his numerous merits; yet there rose to her fancy the figure of the Colonel's brother, invested with all the charm of the unknown. Surely, as her friend suggested, it was best to wait and see.

II.

MR. MEREDITH arrived—an improved edition of the Colonel. The Colonel was tall, but his brother was taller; straight, but the brother boasted a bearing yet more erect. All Milford pronounced him the finer-looking man.

He had been received cordially, let us hope, by his relations, and in the evening taken across the way and presented to Miss Lavinia. She found him very interesting, and Mr. Elwood's star began to pale.

"Well, Isabel," said Mr. Meredith, after their return home, as he lounged comfortably in a great damask-covered easy-chair, "you seem to have secured a good time for yourself at any rate."

"Don't you think it will pay? You needn't go on if that is your opinion."

"I mean to go on, of course; it certainly wouldn't pay if I did not; you are always so fiery! But it might have been done a great deal cheaper. Look at these carpets and mirrors and curtains!"

"I dare say. We might have lived in some hovel, but I have roughed it long enough. I think both of you owe me so much, at least. You begrudge it to me, it seems—a few months of humdrum ease in this obscure corner, where you wouldn't stay a week yourself, at any price!"

"You are determined to quarrel to-night, Bel. I don't begrudge you anything. Have all you can make of it, and welcome. It is amusing to see how you carry off your part. Doesn't it bore you?"

"Not much. It is entertaining to see how completely people can be gulled, and how good an actress I can make. Then it's pleasant, once in a way, to be thought respectable. Such a novelty to me, you know," she added, with some bitterness.

"That's all the charm," he answered coolly. "I know your tastes

and respectability would soon pall upon them. But how did you ever get on such terms with a family like these Grays? *They* are the real sort, I take it."

"Certainly, the best people here. It is easy enough. If you had sufficient self-command to live decently for a few weeks, you would find it so."

"Perhaps," lifting his eyebrows, "if the game were worth the candle. But what induced you to turn me over to the spinster? There was the pretty little sister with the red lips and sparkling eyes; it would have been no task to play the amiable to *her*."

"Probably not. But do you think she would have looked at you? I have my reasons. If anything goes wrong we shall need every interest enlisted in our behalf."

When the pair drove down the next morning to the show—a combination of fruit and flowers and ladies' fancy needlework—nothing could be sunnier than the lady's aspect. She smiled brightly as she bowed hither and thither to her friends, or turned from time to time to address some observation to her brother. The Colonel was already on the ground. He had a conspicuous position among the judges, besides a general oversight of the occasion. Someone was needed in such a place, to whom any little question of order or precedence could be referred, and the Colonel's standing rendered it eminently fitting that he should be the man.

The show was like many other gatherings of the kind. The tent was pitched upon a grassy level sprinkled with trees and shrubs, which already began to glow with gorgeous colour. A stream, clear with that marvellous clearness of water in autumn, flowed past, reflecting the deep blue sky, with its drifting masses of white cloud. There was no chill in the air; only a crispness, a spirit exhilarating as champagne. A gaily-dressed throng poured into the tent or spread about the grounds; all was life, movement, interest, while in the resplendent air every object stood sharply forth, intensified in colour. The whole gay and shifting scene resembled a brilliant panorama.

Through the cheerful crowd Isabel Meredith and her brother drove slowly, attracting general notice and approval. Every one was glad to meet her eye and exchange a friendly salutation. She had paid the occasion the compliment of dressing handsomely, and the rich, dark hues of her attire set off her sumptuous brunette beauty. "Lovely," "magnificent," "superb," were the murmured comments that followed her progress.

At the door of the tent Miss Lavinia awaited her friend. "I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed. "You are on the committee, and we can do nothing without you." Just then her glance encountered Mr. Meredith's; he bowed with an air of respectful gallantry; she acknowledged it with a certain pleasant flutter of spirits. Nevertheless, she did not forget to wonder if Mr. Elwood were on the ground. She had not seen him yet, but he was sure to

be here ; after contributing so largely to the exhibition, he would not stay away.

"Now Evan," said his sister, "we shall leave you to take care of yourself. Miss Gray and I have work to do. There is plenty to look at, and you can be abundantly entertained."

Spite of this dismissal, Mr. Meredith preferred to loiter in the ladies' footsteps, continually questioning Miss Lavinia as to the design and use of various articles. She bore the annoyance with exemplary good humour.

"Whose is this, did you say ? Mrs. Meredith's—don't you see the card ? Look, my dear ; there is the article you were so doubtful about sending ; the handsomest thing here ! "

"Really, it makes a very neat appearance," said the owner, surveying it complacently. "But how much handsome work there is of every sort; a vast deal more than I should have thought it possible to get together. Speaks well for the industry of our ladies, does it not, Evan ? "

"It is amazing," he answered. "I am quite bewildered among so many splendours. I do not see, Miss Gray, how you can ever come to any just decision. You will make almost as many enemies as there are exhibitors."

"We must do the best we can. One thing is certain ; we shall all be agreed in giving many of the best prizes to your sister. No one will take offence at that, at any rate."

"Ah ! she is liked among her neighbours, then ? "

"Exceedingly. How could it be otherwise ?—so handsome, and so agreeable."

"Thank you, Miss Gray. I am delighted to hear it. Praise of Isabel is quite a personal affair with me. Be good enough to look the other way," he added, as Mrs. Meredith turned to them from the contemplation of a bit of embroidery which had given room for these few words aside ; "Miss Gray and I are having a little conversation not designed for your ear."

"What ?" she asked, laughing. "Am I *de trop*—already ? "

Miss Lavinia hurried to her friend's side. "My dear, how *can* you ?" she whispered, in an agitated voice. "You're too wicked. What will your brother think ? "

"No matter what. He knows me of old. But come, I will be on my good behaviour. I have satisfied my conscience about the work ; haven't you ? Now for the flowers and fruit."

Here, as elsewhere, Mrs. Meredith was paramount. Her verbenas, her geraniums, were the glory of the floral department, while a pyramid of pansies, unmatched for size and beauty, called forth exclamations of delight from all who saw them.

"You must have completely robbed your garden and greenhouses," said Miss Lavinia.

"Yes. But what is one's garden at such a time ? I consider it

quite a patriotic duty to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the occasion." And all who heard her were flattered by this identifying of her interests with their own.

"Well, Lavinia," she continued, when the tour of inspection was complete, "we may as well get our 'associates' together, and decide on things. You really *must* go, Evan; you will be sadly in our way. I want to have this business over," she added to Lavinia, as her brother moved on, "so that you will be at liberty to enjoy yourself. You must drive a few times around the course with Evan."

"I couldn't think of troubling Mr. Meredith."

"I don't think it will trouble him. He wanted to drive you down this morning and come back for me, but I told him that would be a little *too* precipitate."

"Dear Mrs. Meredith, you are brimful of mischief this morning."

"Nay, I think it is you who have done the mischief. No matter, though; let us to business." And the next half hour being given to deliberation and discussion with their fellow-judges, the rival merits of pincushions, patchwork and embroidery were finally adjusted.

Mr. Meredith was soon at hand to prefer his request. The Colonel's horse was swift and powerful, the little carriage light and strong. They dashed round the course at a rate which afforded Miss Lavinia considerably more terror than enjoyment. Her charioteer halted at sight of her pale cheeks and trembling lips.

"Pray, pray excuse me," he said, with profuse apologies. "I so seldom have a lady by my side. You do not like such a rapid pace. It was most careless, most thoughtless of me!"

"You must excuse me," said Miss Lavinia breathlessly, the colour coming back to her cheeks with a pink suffusion very pretty to look at. "I am quite ashamed. It must seem so foolish."

"Not at all. For my own part, I am not an admirer of very courageous women. One has never a chance to protect or re-assure them. Timidity, Miss Gray, is one of the greatest charms of your sex."

Miss Lavinia looked blushfully down, conscious of possessing this charm, at least, in perfection.

"Perhaps you wish to alight," continued her companion. "Though if you will trust me, if you have not been too much alarmed, I beg you will continue our drive."

Miss Lavinia murmured her perfect confidence. The good steed being well held in by Mr. Meredith's powerful arm, they proceeded at a more reasonable pace. Miss Lavinia, recovering herself, glanced about over the pleasant scene. How many carriages, how many people; and how the eyes of those people followed their own progress! She was not insensible to a little thrill of gratified vanity at being thus the chosen companion of the handsome and distinguished stranger. She sought to know if Mr. Elwood were in the crowd, and presently discerned him, talking with a group of ladies. He

bowed with an air of restraint and gravity which she at once referred to Mr. Meredith's position at her side. Her heart softened ; she was sorry to have annoyed him. Yet, as she told herself, he could not expect her to refuse all other attentions, unless—and even then she was not quite sure—

Her companion's voice broke in upon these musings. "Delightful season of the year, is it not ? For me there is nothing like it. Spring is crude, and summer quite prosaic, in comparison."

"It is beautiful, certainly," said Miss Lavinia, in a soft voice, "but rather mournful. Don't you find it so ?"

"Ah, you mean from association. It reminds one of human life—and of decay—and winter coming. But I am familiarised to such thoughts, you know. They don't strike me harshly as they do those who are in their summer still."

Delicious flattery ! This handsome, stately man assuming that he had advanced so far beyond her ! She wished to say something consoling, encouraging, but could think of nothing that did not sound too personal. A little gentle sentiment was quite in Miss Lavinia's line, and the fine dark eyes of Mr. Meredith invested his words with an additional charm.

Isabel Meredith meanwhile loitered about, amused and admired. The rustic character of the occasion, the very mild type of its excitements, did not bore her in the least. Hers was a nature that took its colouring from adjacent objects, and she felt quite capable of being the gracious lady of the manor, which she appeared. The dramatic element within her found scope in playing her part, as she had said ; to have all the accessories in keeping gave her interest and occupation. "How these people who are so attentive would run from me if they knew !" she soliloquised. "I wonder how many of them would act differently in the same set of circumstances. I should have been a steady, respectable character enough if I had been brought up out of harm's way, with plenty of means to gratify my tastes. I daresay I might have been as virtuous as that kind-hearted simpleton who is so delighted with my precious brother's company. Here she comes ! Well, my love," she said to Miss Lavinia as soon as they were alone, "you do look most uncommonly bright ! What is it ? Has Evan been talking sentiment ?"

Miss Lavinia disclaimed the possibility of such a thing, yet the drive had left on her mind a pleasing impression quite removed from the ordinary effect of an exchange of civilities with a casual acquaintance. She felt a little disappointed on learning that Mr. Meredith's stay would be so short ; he was to leave the day after the morrow. "But this is not his last visit, you may be sure," said his sister, meaningly. "I am confident that we shall see him again before long."

Meanwhile, Mr. Elwood kept at a distance. Miss Lavinia could not but regret his self-distrust. Mr. Meredith was fascinating, it is

true ; still he had not obliterated all previous impressions. Vainly did she strive to re-assure the bashful swain by a friendly smile or glance ; he held entirely aloof.

III.

THE Bank of Milford was a humble institution compared with the Leviathans of the metropolis ; yet it ministered admirably well to the necessities of the farmers and merchants and cattle buyers of the region. It was a great convenience to the holders of securities. Many an individual, who would have lain through sleepless nights, dreading a burglar in every unaccustomed sound, slumbered tranquilly when once assured that his bonds were deposited in the strong vault within the impenetrable safe of the Milford bank.

The building stood in its own little yard, shady with horse-chestnut trees, between the dwellings of the cashier and the manager. Its heavily-studded doors and iron-shuttered windows frowned grim defiance at all the covetously inclined. Yet not on these, nor on its bolts and bars, did the bank alone rely for safety. It was never without a human guardian during those dark hours when the unlawfully disposed pursue their labours. A trustworthy person—oftener two—slept in the back-room with an armoury of weapons at the bed-head. A pistol shot in the night would be certain to bring a dozen people to the spot within the next five minutes.

All these precautions were taken chiefly as matters of form ; not the remotest danger was apprehended. No attempt had ever been made upon the institution since its foundation, eighty years ago.

It was the day but one after the show—a wailing, dark, October day. Rain had fallen incessantly since dawn ; a ruthless wind tore the bright autumn leaves from the trees, and flung them in the mud of the highways. Miss Lavinia found the hours dull and heavy. The Colonel's brother had departed in the morning, spite of the dreary weather ; no one had run in to enliven her ; Kitty was away on a visit to a friend. She was glad that night fell early. Evening might prove more cheerful than the day had been.

But what a night it was—how black, how gusty ! At six o'clock one could hardly see his way along the street ; by half-past, the obscurity was dense. Young Plunkett, the returned volunteer, who was the present guardian of the bank, worked cautiously along the lane to the back door, bringing up against the fence at every other step.

It was hard to find the key-hole ; but after a few minutes of fumbling and rattling, the lock yielded ; he went in, lit his lamp, secured the entrance, and sat down to the newspaper. It was dull reading. He had been up all the previous night at some merry-making, and the letters swam before his heavy eyes. He threw down the paper and went to bed.

Lying there he heard the wind raging, moaning, shrieking around the building ; whistling through the keyhole, rattling the windows, shaking

the chimney-board. Was there any other sound? If there were, the wind masked it. He lay awhile, listening, with a drowsy sense of security and rest, which passed gradually into slumber.

The opening of a door awoke him. He had forgotten to fasten it, was his first thought, and one of the boys had come in to spend the evening. The next instant a ray from a dark-lantern streamed through the room; by the sudden light he dimly saw an unfamiliar figure. With a loud cry he sprang to his feet.

The Meredith house was quiet at an early hour that night. The servants, weary with the long, dismal day, were glad to betake themselves to bed after an hour or two of yawning by the kitchen fire. A light in the library showed them that the Colonel was still up, but Mrs. Meredith had retired at dusk with a severe headache.

Soon after their departure, she stole noiselessly downstairs. In her own room she had been busy packing up her wardrobe and every valuable that could be easily removed. Dressed for a journey, she sat down to await the working of events. The parlour was inky-dark, the air damp and chill. She shivered nervously; hope and fear by turns possessed her. If anything went wrong, she had a difficult game to play. Ten—eleven—twelve—sounded at tedious intervals from the French clock on the mantelpiece. What had happened? Still, she was, perhaps, too impatient; for such an undertaking time was needed. But when one, and at last two, had struck, she grew fearfully anxious. There must have been some terrible mischance—and what was she to do? Alone here in the darkness and the storm, what step was possible? None. She must wait, however dangerous, however fatal such delay might prove. She dared not even give way to her feverish agitation by pacing up and down the room. She could only sit motionless, with hands tightly clasped, and ear strained to catch the faintest sound. There was a light tap at the window opening on the lawn. She hurried to it. "Is it you, Philip?" she asked, in a breathless whisper.

"Yes—yes. Let me in—quick!"

"Oh, what has happened? What kept you?"

"Nothing has happened. We're all right."

"All right!" she exclaimed, in a voice of ecstasy.

"Yes; it's here, safe. But we came the nearest to missing it! We found that cub on hand when we got in—the whole place dark, and he in bed at nine! The suddenness of the thing, and the shout he gave, completely upset us for a moment. The safe, too, was a tougher job than we bargained for. If it had held out a half-hour longer, we must have dropped the whole thing, and gone off empty-handed."

"How much is it?"

"Do you think we stopped to count? Enough to keep us for a year or two. But we mustn't dally here; it is time to carry out the

rest of our arrangements. Evan is just outside. We must have the trunks down at once. There is barely time to reach the train."

A few minutes later, the loud peal of the door-bell sounded through the house. The servants awoke, startled by the unusual summons. Before they gathered courage to answer it, the Colonel himself went down. Voices were heard, and soon the errand was made known. A telegram had arrived from the telegraph office, which was open all night at Milford. Mrs. Meredith's mother was dangerously ill, and she must come immediately. And Thomas was away—not returned from his two days' furlough. The Colonel must harness the horses; no help for that. Mrs. Meredith speedily appeared, in travelling dress and cloak, and bade a hurried but kind farewell to her dependants. The trunks were taken up from the sheltering darkness outside, the Colonel mounted the box, and the carriage whirled down the gravelled sweep and out on the road towards the station.

A cloudless morning succeeded the wild night. People spoke cheerfully to each other as they went about the streets and rejoiced that the storm was over.

Towards nine o'clock, the porter came around, as usual, to the back entrance of the bank. He had no need of keys that morning. The door was open, and a large hole went through it, from side to side, through heavy plank and solid iron.

With a wild look of alarm he rushed into the office. A glance showed what had happened. Drills and crowbars lay around; the door of the vault was open; the safe was dragged out, broken into, and—empty! The poor man gazed stupefied upon the ruins.

A low groan recalled his scattered senses. He hurried to the back room, undrew the curtains of the bed, and beheld the hapless Plunkett. There he lay, blindfolded, gagged and bound—bound with an ingenuity, a complexity, which it was a work of time to undo. Aid was summoned, and his bonds were loosed, but he could tell little beyond what was known already. He remembered a brief struggle and a heavy blow; and after that no more, till he found himself in the state in which he was discovered. He could hear the burglars at their work; the hum of voices, the creaking of the floor as the heavy safe rolled out upon its castors. In what impatient agony he lay, powerless to lift voice or finger, waiting for what should happen next! He knew at last by the cessation of their blows, that the work was either successful or abandoned. Then he heard them going off, and after a long interval became aware, from the crowing of the cocks and other sounds, that morning had arrived. His liberation followed in time.

This story gave no clew to the perpetrators of the outrage. He had but a moment's glimpse at his antagonist—a large man, whose back was towards him. There was no surmise as to his identity. But if all else were doubtful, one thing was certain—the safe was empty. Sixty thousand pounds had vanished like a dream.

The news spread like wildfire through all the Milford region. Directors, bondholders and depositors poured towards the bank. Hopgrowers and dairymen, who had left the product of their sales in the keeping of the institution ; rich farmers whose securities were counted by thousands ; poor ones, whom a good crop last year had enabled to invest a few pounds ; widows, whose sole provision for their fatherless children lay in the stolen funds ; struggling mechanics or professional men, who looked to their savings for all the little comforts their families possessed. They came together—some eager, some frightened, some incredulous—to mingle inquiries and conjectures, amazements and laments. In the prevailing disorder, the holders of registered bonds alone maintained composure.

At the first word of the disaster, Miss Lavinia hurried to her friend, Mrs. Meredith ; Bridget and Nora met her with accounts of the last night's summons.

"And think of her, poor dear, with her head aching fit to split, called out of her warm bed to hear such news as that," said Bridget, an Irish girl.

"Her mother was very ill, then ?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Deed, and it's meself believes she'll not be living the morn," returned Nora, colouring the picture to suit her own fancy. "The mistress will only be in time to wake her."

"And she said nothing of when she would be back, of course ?"

"Sorra word, miss. 'I shall stay till my mother is better,' she says ; 'or till——' We knew what she meant, poor lady. 'My love to Miss Gray,' says she, 'and I'll write the first minute I have time.' If you get a letter, miss, you'll let us know ?"

"Certainly. You are to stay in the house, then ?"

"Yes, miss. 'Stay till you have word from me,' was her directions, 'and make yourselves as comfortable as you can.' Sure, she'd the kind heart for us through all her trouble, like a raal lady, as she is."

Miss Lavinia walked homeward, full of sympathy for her friend, and reckoning how many days must pass ere she could reasonably expect the promised letter. Mrs. Meredith's mother lived in the North, she knew ; a whole day's journey from Milford.

Meanwhile, the excitement of the plundered community increased. To the first eager inquiries succeeded consternation, as the unmistakable calamity revealed itself ; then came a hundred wild conjectures, plans and recollections. One man had heard a wagon, driven furiously, pass his house the night before, and wondered that any one could be reckless enough to plunge through the darkness at such a rate. It was at first proposed to trace this wagon, to make inquiries all along the road in that direction, and learn if any suspicious characters had been seen at any point. But investigation developed the existence of so many wagons, going furiously in so many different ways, that the project was abandoned. New plans were suggested, and in these amateur performances some valuable hours were lost.

It was afternoon when the authorities decided on their action and telegraphed to Scotland Yard for a detective officer.

The famous Mr. Buller came down, heard young Plunkett's narrative, and dismissed him; then had a little talk with the cashier.

"Is there any one in the neighbourhood that suspicion can attach to? Any one who knows the situation of the vault, the nature of the fastenings, and all that?"

"Of course. Any of our customers know—or can, if they choose; but there is not a person whom we could suspect."

"No new resident, eh? No one whose antecedents you are not familiar with?"

"Nobody—unless—why, there's the Colonel! but he is beyond suspicion."

"What colonel?"

"Colonel Meredith. Rents the handsome place you may have noticed, just east of the town. He came here in the spring."

"What is he colonel of?"

"Indeed I never thought to ask. A fine, soldierly-looking man.

"What kind of person—showy, dashing?"

"Just the reverse. Cultivates his land and goes to church."

"I should like to see him, all the same. Get him down here quietly, if you can. If not, I must have a look at him in his own house."

"Sorry I can't oblige you," said the cashier, laughing for the first time since he saw the empty safe. "Really, the idea is *too* good—the Colonel! But he is away just now."

"*Away?*"

"Yes. A telegram. Mrs. Meredith's mother is dangerously ill—"

Mr. Buller threw up both his hands. "Dolts! idiots!" he exclaimed. "A case a child might have seen into!"

"You are not very civil," said the cashier, reddening.

"It's no time for compliments. We must follow your precious Colonel, for he's the man."

"Stuff!" said the cashier, with deliberate contempt. "One of our very best men—and Mrs. Meredith sometimes plays the organ in church! You might as well suspect the parson."

"I should, if I saw cause."

"Yes—and look here. He had securities for ten thousand pounds in our safe—what do you say to that?"

"Counterfeit," no doubt.

"I hope you can convince him of it when he comes back."

Mr. Buller stayed not for further argument. Inquiry at the office speedily established the fact that no telegram had been received for Colonel Meredith. The cashier's confidence began to waver. He remembered that when the July interest was due, the Colonel had neglected to send on his coupons, having, as he said, no need for

money at the time. Before long the case was clear enough to every eye. The Merediths did not return, and Miss Lavinia had no letter. Bills poured in on every hand. The carpenters and masons had received but a small instalment of their dues, with hopes held out of liberal employment in the future; the same course had been pursued with upholsterers and furniture dealers, grocers and dairy-men. The very wages of the servants were left unpaid for weeks. Never was perfect confidence so perfectly dispelled.

Mr. Buller did his best; the whole detective machinery was set in motion. Milford people were sanguine. Ascribing superhuman sagacity to their agent, they had little doubt of recovering the whole amount, and dealing out the strictest retribution to the offenders. As time passed, and these hopes waned, they still relied upon a compromise; believed that by foregoing their just vengeance, and surrendering a portion of the spoil, they might secure the rest. But to arrange a compromise two parties are required, and the Merediths were not forthcoming. Nothing is accurately known of them to this day.

The bank went on; the vault was strengthened, and a new safe procured, on which its admirers proudly say they give any burglar leave to try his skill.

Miss Lavinia held by the Merediths to the very last moment that such adherence was possible; but there came a time when she was forced to renounce her friend, her friend's husband, and, saddest of all, her friend's brother. Fortunately, no one knew how many pleasant fancies she had built on that idea, though several sympathizing virgins condoled with her having made herself so very conspicuous the day of the flower show.

If this kind compassion mortified her, she was ere long abundantly consoled. Mr. Elwood took heart of grace and renewed his advances, which were received with all the encouragement a modest maiden should bestow. One clear winter morning, Miss Lavinia walked up the broad aisle of the church, clad in misty lace and gleaming satin, as pretty a bride as you would wish to see, and followed by a white-robed train. Mr. Elwood met her at the altar. On this occasion she was again conspicuous, and the sympathizing virgins looking on, perhaps, compassionated her as tenderly as before.



A FEW HOURS IN A BLIZZARD.

BY ADA M. TROTTER.

MRS. CLIFFORD and her daughter Dove lived in a flat in a comfortable, old-fashioned house in the West end of Montreal. The fact that it was an *old* house delighted Dove, she did not know why Madame, who lived below, was so ready to expatriate on the many inconveniences of an old house. Why should she know? Here was this bright little Madame, like most French Canadians, full of resources and ready to do anything for her "locataires," also Martha, Madame's little servant, who thought it an honour to be allowed to enter the flat upstairs. Nothing could have been more comfortably arranged than this same flat in the old-fashioned house.

When the water froze downstairs, poor Madame had to thaw the pipes. Send for a plumber! no, indeed. Madame despised men; they were dull, slow creatures, these men, and charged exorbitantly. There was nothing Madame could not do far better than a man.

Madame rose every morning at an early hour and noiselessly arranged the house below, thus holding herself ready at any moment to attend to the affairs of her "locataires."

The early winter of 1890 was unusually mild. Christmas Day was positively too warm to be agreeable in houses heated by stoves and furnaces. Out of doors, the snow was melting in the brilliant sunshine; the mountain lost its dazzling whiteness, and masses of snow and ice floated about the river. As yet there was no sign of a road across the St. Lawrence.

The papers were full of records of the deadly Grippe which was making its way across the continent. Isolated cases of heavy Influenza had already occurred in Montreal, but the doctors held out against calling these "The Grippe."

Then suddenly the city was stricken by the enemy. Doctors, clergymen, old and young people were among the victims, and, to intensify the miseries and dangers of the hour, the mild weather gave place to intense cold, and a travelling blizzard capped its earlier enormities by a wholesale onslaught on the province of Quebec.

Dove rose that morning with limbs weighted with lead, head aching, and eyes streaming; every symptom, in fact, of a bad attack of grippe, or influenza; but sheer fright drove all remembrance that such was the case away, and she really does not know if the disease ran its course or not. She found her mother in agonies of pain, for "the grippe" showed itself in an infinite variety of forms, and this of heart-failure was one of the most painful.

"Madame," she called, "will you run down to the grocer's and telephone for the Doctor? At once, please, dear Madame."

There was no answer ; only a harsh, metallic cough from Madame's room, and Dove ran down to find this rock of strength feeble as an infant, unable to lift her head from the pillow.

"And where was Martha ? "

"Alas ! Mademoiselle, poor Martha could not hold up her head last night. I fear she has the 'Grippe.' "

"Here's a situation," groaned Dove, as she put on her furs and went out to telephone to the doctor.

"I've been up all night," telephoned the Doctor, hoarsely ; "and I have the Grippe myself, and ought to be in bed. But I'll try and come round in the course of the morning."

Dove found the wind so high as she returned that she could hardly make way against it. The cold, too, was of the most penetrating quality ; exhausting to the vitality.

"I know it's down to zero," said Dove. "Oh, how I hate zero ! Perhaps, however, we shall feel nothing of it in our cosy flat."

Thus encouraged she struggled along, knee-deep in the snow, and was stranded by the wind in a drift at the foot of the steps ; but Dove was nothing if not active, so she clambered up the glittering mass, and slid down to the porch door.

Presently, the Doctor arrived. He was very cross ; very tired ; and his opinion was not cheerful of either invalid. He said he had about two hundred patients waiting for him ; and now here was the Blizzard to make things worse ; for it is an enemy that cannot be kept out by brick and stone ; it comes in like an icy ghost through the walls, and circulates round and round the rooms until it appears as though one stood out of doors and stoves and furnaces gave no heat. The wind was pelting the snow like hard sand against the windows, through which it sifted, though the outer panes were sealed to keep out draughts.

"It's a regular blizzard," said the Doctor. "The thermometer has been falling all night. It is ten below zero now. You must cover the windows with blankets to keep out the cold air. Keep up the temperature to 60° day and night."

The Doctor ran downstairs, darted into his sleigh, and drove up to some other one of his two hundred cases of Grippe, hardly able to hold up his head for pain.

Dove went to work with blankets, step-ladder, hammer and nails ; keeping anxious watch over the open stove where a huge fire blazed cheerily, burning in clear, red glow, as coal always does during a spell of zero weather. To her discomfiture, she found the thermometer very obstinate in clinging to the fifties, and she ran downstairs to turn on the hall stove "full drive." Then she closed all the doors except those belonging to the two invalids, and passed the day in incessant work for one or other. The afternoon was drawing to a close before she realised her very serious position. Not a soul had come to the house since the Doctor left in the morning.

She went into her room, opened the ventilating pane, and for a second looked into the street. There were no sleighs, no cars; in fact, not a human being was to be seen. The street was simply a snow-drift, and it would be an utter impossibility for Dove to get as far as the end of the block to telephone for help.

The last of the coal was now needed for the fire, and there was no one to get any more. Dove understood now why Madame abused an old-fashioned house; the coal had to be kept in a shed some twenty feet from the kitchen door. She ran downstairs to look into the hopper of the self-feeding stove; *that*, at any rate, was good for another twelve hours; but the supply upstairs was utterly exhausted.

The registering thermometer by this time indicated thirty below zero, Fahr.—*i.e.*, 58° below freezing point—a degree of cold which only the robust dare go out into and combat without exhaustion. The thermometer in the sick-room was, notwithstanding all Dove's pains, still in the fifties, and to permit the fire to go down would mean certain death to the invalid.

"Mademoiselle, where are you going?" cried Madame as Dove passed her door.

"Madame, there is no coal upstairs. I am going out to the shed."

"But Mademoiselle shall not go," cried the kind little woman. "Only wait a little moment and *I* shall go. A little patience, Mademoiselle!"

"*You* go out with bronchitis, and 30° below zero," cried Dove; "how dare you think of such a mad proceeding?"

So Dove, with the largest coal box she could find on her arm, went sturdily downstairs to the kitchen regions. A huge iron shovel lay close to the outer kitchen door; Dove set the bucket down for a moment beside it. This meant a little pause to get up her courage, for the roar of the wind and the swirl of the blinding snow would have daunted a stronger heart than hers, even if braced up by a vigorous physique. Dove knew from sad experience that she must inevitably freeze at so low a record as 30° below zero; and then how was she to stand up in a storm such as this?

"It's got to be done," said Dove, grimly. "I dare say it is not half so bad as it looks."

She pulled the fur cap close over her ears, tied a woollen cloud over her face to protect eyes and nose, and pulled the heavy arctics over her boots. There was no further excuse for a moment's pause, so she grasped the bolt of the door and slid it back.

The wind tore the door so furiously from her hand that poor Dove, after an effort at balance, found herself, bucket, spade and all, in a drift beside the threshold. Now it is a very easy matter to fall *into* a drift, but it requires judgment to assist one to get out of it, as struggling to rise merely sends one deeper into the snow bank. But here the bucket stood a friend in need; Dove rose on its firm basis,

and took a step onwards. Fortunately the snow was wind-driven towards the fence, and therefore not more than two feet deep on the path between the kitchen and the shed.

"Just my luck," said Dove, apt to consider herself fortunate in small things ; so she struggled valiantly along, with the iron spade for a staff and the bucket for balance. The situation to any but the robust was one of danger—for the blast of the blizzard is deadly in its icy penetration ; the snow, swept onwards by its wide-spreading wings, cuts like a knife ; and in turning her back on it in order to take breath, Dove found her garments extemporised into sails, which drove her towards the snow-bank by the fence, where she must have perished. Well, it is hardly romantic to owe one's life to a bucket and a heavy iron spade, but Dove knows well how much was due to these humble friends during that struggle for existence, between the kitchen and the shed-door.

This door, somewhat sunken, was choked with fine snow, and frozen so that it would not give space to a midge to enter. Dove, breathless but valiant, set the bucket down, and taking the spade as a battering-ram, plunged against the rickety door. It gave way at the hinges and came down with a clatter. Meantime the bucket had settled into the snow and was frozen there ; when it was at length dug out, the bottom was so humpy with lumps of ice that it could not be induced to stand, and the coal that Dove laboriously shovelled in tumbled out in a manner that would have exasperated a saint. By this time another calamity threatened her—feet and hands were numbed, and, unless she could speedily get up the circulation, would undoubtedly freeze.

What happened in the next few minutes remains ever a kind of nightmare, of working against impossibilities ; but the next thing she distinctly remembers was the weight of the bucket, which she had to carry with both hands and set down at every step. The minutes seemed hours, and when the outer kitchen was reached at last, Dove was gasping for breath, as one half-drowned. Her hair was blown down and twisted into the cloud, as though a mischievous hand had tied it perversely into snarls. Her eyelids were frozen, so that she had to wait until the water thawed and rolled away like a tear before she could bolt the door again, and rid herself of the heavy arctics.

After this came another season of struggle, between three flights of stairs and the weight of the bucket in unaccustomed arms.

"I've done it," at last said Dove to herself, as she sat on the top stair, looking lovingly at the well-filled box beside her. Then she went back to her invalid.

It was an awful night ; the blizzard increased in fury, and by seven o'clock in the morning the bucket was again empty. Exhausted by the night's watching, Dove contemplated another visit to the shed with horror ; she feared that she could never get through the twelve hours' accumulation of snow. What was to be done ? Again she

opened the pane and looked into the street. If only the milkman would appear! he was one of the kindest men in the world, and would do anything to serve her. But it would be hours before the milkman could break the track and come in over the country roads. Nor could Dove go into the street; the snow had drifted half-way up the house door. It was a regular blockade. "May God give me strength," prayed Dove fervently, as she took the bucket in her hand and began to roll herself up in furs and wraps.

At that very moment came a sound of stamping outside. Then a kind of earthquake shook the house; this was caused by the wrenching open of the outside door, frozen in the intense cold. Then the door bell rang.

Dove had flown downstairs at the first sound, and now precipitated herself into the arms of the rosy, fur-clothed monster, who stood shaking the dry snow pellets from his clothes.

"Jack! oh, Jack! whatever made you come so early?"

"Oh, I've been all night in the train; it's stuck fast a mile or two away. We were all so hungry that we ate up everything."

"But how did you get here?"

"I chartered an old habitant to bring me. I haven't been home yet. I've been bothered all night thinking perhaps Madame and Martha would get the grippe, and you might be left without coal in this blizzard."

This was the second time that Dove had unconsciously brought this brother to her aid at a crisis. The first time he broke his journey and travelled a hundred miles because he was awakened during the night by her voice calling him, his arrival home being as opportune as on this second occasion. But, psychology apart, now see the cheer this rosy-cheeked, healthy Hercules has brought to the flat. What a rattling and banging of stoves! How he sends the ashes flying all over the dainty rooms in his zeal! How he carries coal, too, until he's as black as a coalheaver, and has to perform an elaborate toilet before he is presentable again!

"I say, Dove, that box is too heavy to carry up three flights when it is full," he remarked, as he lifted it into place by the stove.

"I know," said Dove meekly. "I did it yesterday."

"*You* did! However did you get to the shed in the blizzard?"

"I don't know. It was horrid, and I froze my toes again."

"Horrid! I wonder you are alive to tell the story. *That* comes of living in an old-fashioned house, with no man to look after things. I told—"

But he never finished his sentence, for Dove made a sudden friendly assault upon him, under which, man-like, he went down.

A CHRISTMAS VOICE.

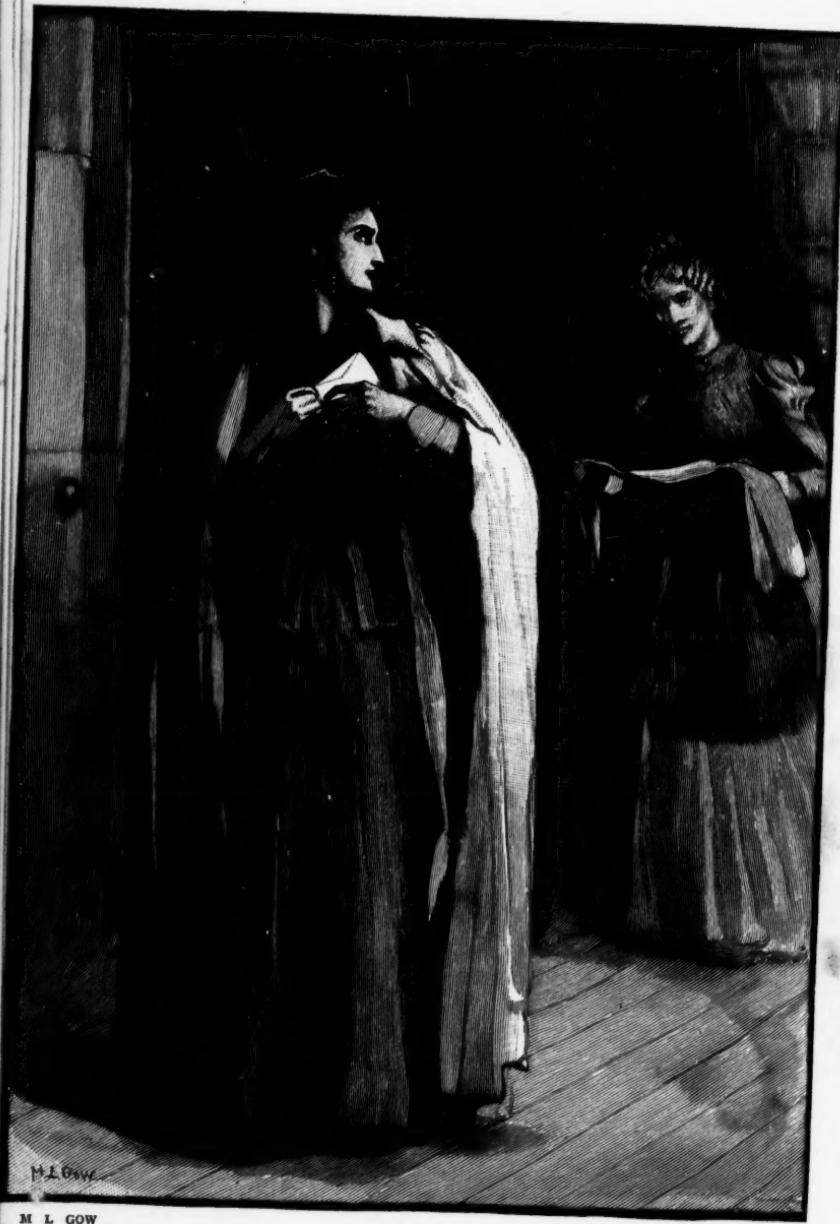
OH, the merry, merry bells of Christmas !
 Hark ! hark ! do you hear them ring ?
 And the merry, merry Christmas carols,
 Do you hear the children sing ?
 And the winsome, blithesome, bonny lasses,
 Do you see their smiling eyes ?
 And the shining of their silken raiment,
 And their cheeks' carnation dyes ?

Ah, the city's face is smiling, smiling also,
 And the city's heart is glad.
 And the city's lights are gaily, gaily shining,
 And the world with mirth runs mad.
 But I hear an undertone of wailing,
 From hearths where Christmas never goes ;
 Ringing up, up to the bending Heaven—
 The story of the poor man's woes.

“ Food, or we perish, oh, our brothers !
 For the love of Heaven give us bread !
 Say your grace and eat your Christmas dinners,
 Let the wine of your feasts be red—
 But the grace shall bring a curse instead of blessing
 If it goes up mingled with our cries ;
 If no human ear will hear our pleadings,
 They shall echo to the far-off skies.

“ Shall wives and weans lie starving at your thresholds,
 Dying there for lack of fire and food ?
 Are they not Heaven's children too, my fellow Christians ?
 They are human flesh and blood.
 Oh, the FATHER's hand has not been shortened,
 And His vision is not dim ;
 If your needy brothers perish at your gateways,
 You shall answer unto Him ! ”

Feb 7



M L GOW

R. TAYLOR.

FROM THAT MOMENT HER PUNISHMENT BEGAN.